NOTES ON GAME

AND

GAME SHOOTING

Francis Alvey Rhodes
Darwin, M.A.

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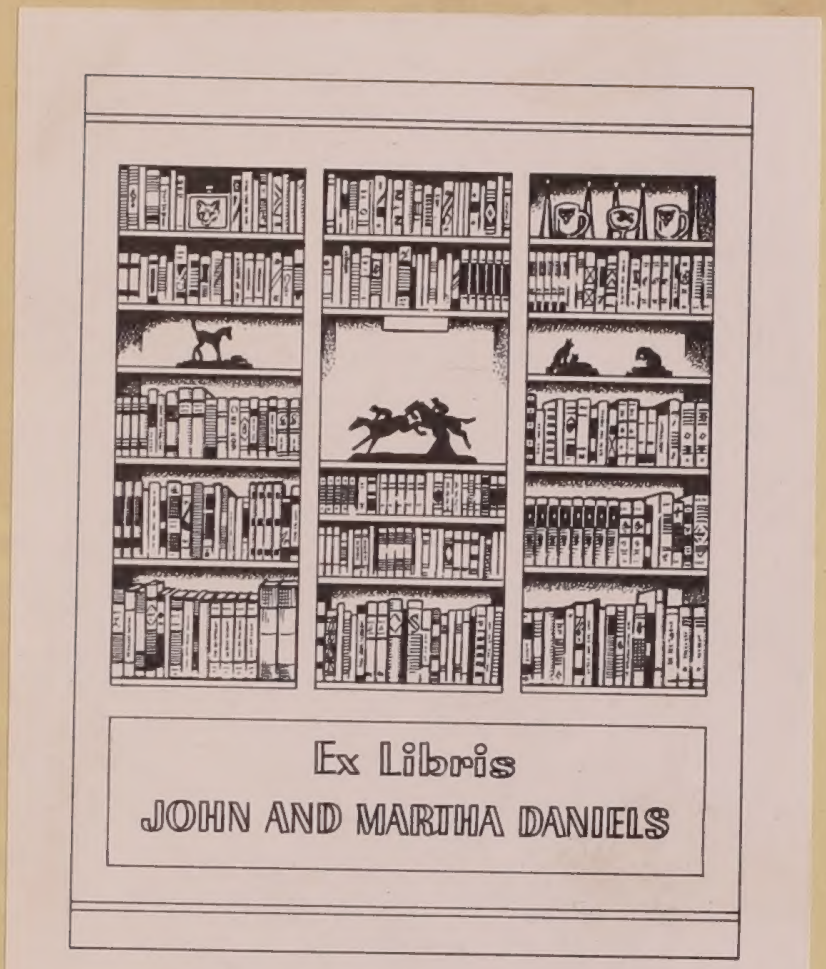

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January 22nd 1881

LUNCHEON ON THE MOORS.

NOTES ON

GAME & GAME SHOOTING.

MISCELLANEOUS

OBSERVATIONS ON BIRDS AND ANIMALS

AND

ON THE SPORT THEY AFFORD FOR THE GUN IN

GREAT BRITAIN.

ILLUSTRATED.

By J. J. MANLEY, M.A.,

AUTHOR OF "NOTES ON FISH AND FISHING," &c.

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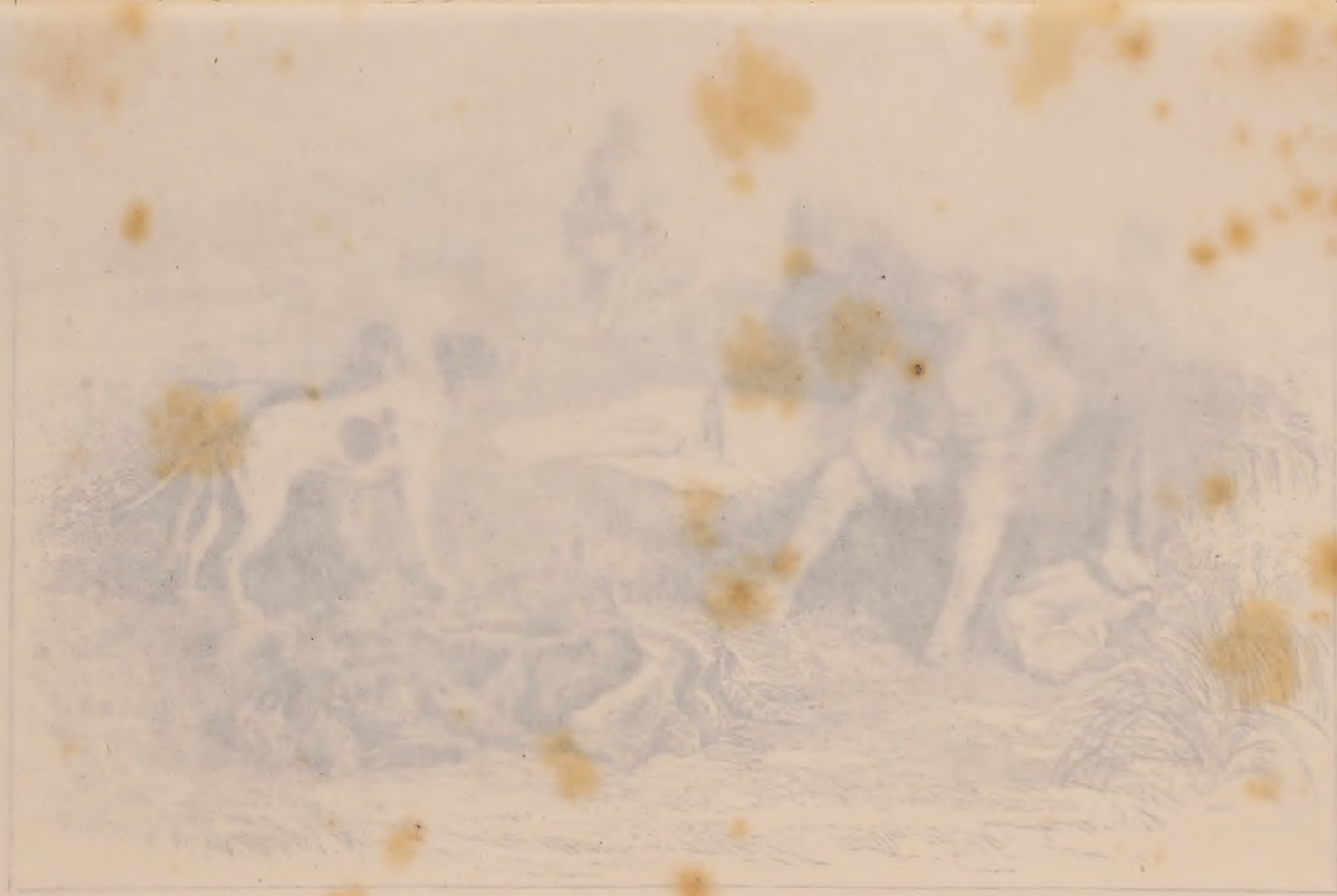

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LONDON :
PRINTED BY ALFRED BRADLEY, 170, STRAND, W.C.

PREFACE.

THESE Notes, good reader—or, as I should prefer to address you, brother sportsman—were, in substance, contributed from time to time to the columns of the *Country;* and are now, with some additions and corrections, presented in book form.

They do not aspire to be considered as a complete natural history of the objects of the home sportsman's pursuit, nor as an exhaustive treatise on the science and practice of shooting. The small size of the volume precludes such an ambitious idea. They hardly aspire to be more than miscellaneous notes and jottings, the results, mainly, of my own experience and observation; and if sportsmen generally, young and old—especially the former—take any pleasure in their perusal, one object, at least, of their publication will be attained.

But though the volume is of a somewhat discursive character, each chapter is written on a more or less

definite plan, the nomenclature, the natural history, the method of pursuit, and the gastronomic merits of each bird and beast of sport being discussed in order.

Some apology, perhaps, may be expected for the omission of Notes on Wild Fowl and Fowling, with the exception of those on Snipe. I can only say that the subject is far too wide an one to be dealt with in a volume of the present dimensions. It would really require a large volume to itself.

The introduction of Rooks, &c., may seem out of place; but I will hope that to some readers it may be interesting.

But whatever be adjudged the merits or otherwise of the letter-press for which I am responsible, I feel sure that all who take these Notes in hand will be pleased with the admirable Illustrations provided by Mr. James Temple.

J. J. M.

August, 1880.

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GROUSE.

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NOTES ON

GAME & GAME SHOOTING.

GROUSE.

THE French, amongst other mad capers in which they nationally indulged at the close of the last century, re-arranged and gave new names to the months of the year, basing the nomenclature they invented on the real or supposed meteorological condition of each thirty days, or on the vegetable productions of the earth which ought then to be in season. Thus there was Nivôse, "Snow-month;" Pluviôse, "Rain-month;" Ventôse, "Wind-month;" Floréal, "Flower-month;" Thermidor, "Heat-month;" Fructidor, "Fruit-month," and so on: and after all there was a method in this madness, for the names were by no means badly chosen. If English sportsmen,

and particularly the lovers of the gun, had to re-name the months, they would doubtless call August "Grouse-month," September "Partridge-month," October "Pheasant-month," November "Snipe" or "Woodcock-month," and so forth. It is to the three first named of these months that the great body of sportsmen in the United Kingdom look forward from the time that they put away their guns at the end of January till they overhaul them at the beginning of August, preparatory to operations on the Twelfth, through November, "Snipe" or "Woodcock-month," with December and January, according to circumstances and the season, afford plenty of miscellaneous shooting. In making a few notes and jottings on the above named birds, and the sport they afford us, I naturally take Grouse first in order, as in the Sportsman's Calendar they are the first game birds with which he deals at the opening of the shooting season.

Ornithologically Grouse are classed under the order of the Gallinæ, and are thus allied with various families and sub-families, which come under this order, for instance, pheasants, partridges, peacocks, turkeys, and "fowls," domestic and otherwise. The grouse family is that of the Tetraonidæ; and here I must at the outset indulge a weakness I have for etymology, and ask why this term

was applied to the family in question. I know that "the judicious" Hooker says, and says well, that "he who seeketh a reason for all things destroyeth all reason;" but I confess I like etymological reasons for nomenclature which is suggestive of a scientific character; and it often happens that getting to the root of words opens up questions of interest connected with a subject in hand, in addition to settling that of verbal derivation. When writing my "Notes on Our Game Birds," in *The Country*, I was candid enough to confess that I was at a loss for the etymology of "Tetraonidæ," or rather of "Tetrao," as applied to each species of grouse. I suggested that it might be derived from the Greek word which signifies "four," and sounds very like "Tetrao," and that it had been applied to grouse on account of their plump and sturdy configuration, which gave them the appearance of having bodies of four equal sides, or rather representing solid squares. In making this suggestion, I cannot say I was in full earnest, my object really being, as I indirectly intimated, to invite correspondents of *The Country* to help me, and I may add my readers, out of the etymological difficulty. I soon had my object attained by the appearance in the columns of the paper just

mentioned of communications from Benjamin Badaud, "Saxon," and "Zoilus," the main portions of which I here insert. The first named says:

"In the first place, 'tetrao' was never used by the Romans to express the bird we call 'grouse.' By it Pliny meant the bird we call a bustard, and so did Suetonius. (*Vide* Plin., 10, 20, and Suet. Calig. 22.) It would be superfluous to say that 'tetrao' must have been formed from τετράων, the root of which is τετράζω (*glocio*), to cluck or cackle, as the poultry correspondents will bear witness is the custom with hens who have just laid an egg. Now, I think 'Onomatopæia verbum ex sono fictum' offers the most rational derivation of 'tetrao' τετράων as well as of the Latin word 'glocio' and the English word 'cluck;' all three being derived from the sounds uttered by the birds. Every grouse shooter knows that of an old cock grouse, when forced to take flight rather unexpectedly. Those who never heard it may read an account of it in my paper on 'Taking the Grouse Census,' printed in the *Field* of 11th August, 1855."

"Saxon" says that the writer in *The Country* "must surely be joking when he proposes to derive 'tetraonidæ' from the Greek word τέτρα [in compound words]. The

suggestion may be ingenious, but it is far-fetched, and, in my humble opinion, incorrect. 'Tetraonidæ'—the family name—has evidently the same etymology as 'tetrao,' which is derived from the Greek τετράων, a moor-fowl. Hesychius gives τετράων as being synonymous with τετράδων and τεταῖον, both of which words appear to be etymologically connected with the verb τετράζειν, to cackle. Connected with τετράζειν are the words τεταξ and τετριξ, and most probably all three of them were coined in fanciful imitation of the cry of the bird."

"Zoilus" backs up the others, saying :

"I agree with 'Saxon' and Mr. Badaud that 'tetrao' is in all probability derived from τετράζειν, to cackle, in imitation of the bird's cry. An immense number of names have been given in this way, by what Mr. B. learnedly styles 'onomatopæia.' The Latin words 'glocire,' 'glocito,' Gallice *Glousses,* have evidently been so formed. Even περδιξ, perdix, *perdrix,* partridge, savour of the sound made by the bird's wings when rising, which, when louder than usual, generally announces fine weather and a good shooting day. I am of Mr. B.'s opinion that neither τεταῖον nor 'tetrao' signified a grouse, or moor-fowl, but rather a bustard, *cane-petiére,*

outarde, in French. Neither Greek nor Latin naturalists can be supposed to have been well acquainted with the denizens of the far north."

Lest I should weary my present readers, and with the assurance that I am not going to bore them with many Greek words in the following pages, let me say that I am satisfied with the etymological explanations just given, though not with the appropriateness of the nomenclature, for I fail to appreciate the onomatopæia (*i.e.*, the giving of a name to a creature from some sound it utters)—in this instance no grouse "tetracizing" sufficiently plainly to my ear to warrant the title of "Tetrao."

But a moment—*unde derivatur* "grouse?" I said in *The Country* that it was probably only a corruption of the word "gorse"—furze—and that hence the term "gor-cock," or "gorse-cock," was applied to the red grouse. Here, again, Mr. Badaud came to the rescue as follows: "With regard to the English word grouse, or gor-cock (not gorse-cock), we must again have recourse to onomatopæia. 'Gor' was prefixed to express the sound uttered by the bird when rising, and very often when settling. We have the word 'gor' or 'gore-crow,' a carrion-crow—another example of onomatopæia. Perhaps the word 'grouse' was derived from the Welsh

'grugiar' from grug, ling, Scottice heather (*Calluna vulgaris*)." Further, he pertinently remarks that red grouse are not often found in gorse (or furze) unless driven there by storms from the more congenial heather.

The Grouse Family is distributed pretty widely throughout the Arctic and temperate regions; but as far as we are concerned in the British islands we have only four species resident among us. These Macgillivray and most naturalists divide into two sub-families, to one of which the title "*tetrao*" is specially applied, and to the other "*lagopus*." The four species are respectively termed (1) *Tetrao urogallus,* the Capercaillie, or Capercailzie, or Cock-of-the-Wood; (2) *Tetrao tetrix,* or Black grouse or Blackgame; (3) *Lagopus Scoticus* or Red grouse; and (4) *Lagopus mutus*, or *albus*, the Ptarmigan, or White grouse. This distinction is probably ornithologically correct, though some maintain that the red and the white grouse are not really more distinct one from the other than are low-country brown hares and mountain white ones. The term *lagopus* has been given to the two last named species of grouse because not only have they feathered tarsi, but because, like the hare (λαγως, *lagos*), they have their feet feathered or covered with a hairy kind of plumage.

The following lines, in the "Hiawatha" metre, picturesquely enough describe the haunts of these varieties of grouse:—

In the north the Capercailzie
Dwells amid the dark pine forests,
And his husky crow at morning
Wakes the echoes of the mountain;
Down whose side, with foam and sparkle,
Leaps the streamlet, overshadowed
By the drooping lady birches;
There his bold bright eye outflashes,
Like a gem in scarlet setting:
There his purple plumes resplendent
Catch the sunshine as he walketh
Proudly in his own dominions—
He the monarch among game birds!

On the purple heath-clad moorland,
Where the grey cairn standeth lonely,
And the ruined watch-tower telleth
Of the border strife and foray;
There the Blackcock's glossy plumage
Shines amid the stunted bushes,
Juniper, and ling, and grasses
Waving golden in the sunshine;
There his hoarse crow breaks the silence
To the crouching Grey-Hen calling.

All amid the broom sae bonnie,
Where the silver gowans twinkle,
Where the river to the lowlands,
Floweth on as though rejoicing,
Sterile heights to leave, and wander
Through the fruitful plains and valleys;
There the Red Grouse—Scottish muirfowl,

In his dress of brown embroidered
O'er with purple, gold, and crimson,
Feeds on heather tops and berries,
Flying oft from ridge to hollow,
With his mates on sounding pinions—
Welcome sounds to eager sportsman!

Meantime where the mountain summits,
Covered o'er with snowy mantles,
Pierce the sky, and spots of verdure,
Few and far between, seem islands
In a sea of rolling billows,
Dashing up their mingling foam-crests,
There the Ptarmigan—the white grouse—
Like in kind unto the moor-fowl,
Dwells in solitude sublimest;
Lonely dwells where seldom cometh
Foot of man; where seldom echo
Wakes to hear the mimic thunder
Of the death-devoting barrel,
'Mid the peaks reverberating,
'Mid the glens and rocky hollows.

Let me now take the four species of grouse in order, and say a few words concerning each ornithologically and from a sportman's point of view.

The King of Grouse is decidedly the Capercaillie—*Tetrao urogallus*, which latter word may be translated "Bull-cock," the prefix "bull" in more languages than our own signifying "large"; Cock-of-the-Wood is another name by which he is known; and Buffon terms him *Le Grand Coq de Bruyére*. Some say that the old Gaelic

word *Capullcoille* meant literally "Horse-of-the-Wood," and that that was the bird's original appellation; but the accomplished Gaelic scholar, Dr. Maclauchlan, holds that Capercaillie comes direct from the Gaelic *Cabhar*, old bird, and *coille*, wood. North of Inverness they say, or used to say, *Capercabye*, or *Auer-calze*, which remind us of the Dutch and German names for the bird, *Auerhan* and *Ouerhan*, both having reference to its large size. I have however seen it stated that the *ur* has nothing to do with *urus*, buffalo, and that it is a Danish primitive word, and that *Auerhan* means simply a meadow fowl. But who can decide when etymological doctors differ? However, as the word is doubtless of Gaelic origin, it seems that orthographically we should write *Capercaillie* in preference either to *Capercailzie* or *Capercally*, for the simple reason that there is no *y* or *z* in Gaelic.

A noble bird indeed is the Capercaillie, the largest member of the grouse family, and of all British game birds; and, with the exception of the cock pheasant, the brightest in plumage. Of course I am speaking of the cock bird, with his rich dress of black, brown and grey, beautifully shaded, and tinged with a fine glossy golden green. Over each large, full, flashing eye is a distinct arch of red; he has the short, stout, conical bill, charac-

teristic of the grouse family; thick and strong legs, covered with brownish-grey feathers, and toes and claws black. This is the plumage of the adult cock, who, however, is not in full perfection till his third year, when he will weigh from ten to fifteen pounds, and measure over two feet and a half in length. The hen bird, though she may fairly be called the "Queen-of-the-Woods," is smaller, and of sober plumage, contrasting with the cock as the grey-hen does with her lord the blackcock, a sober mottled nondescript creature, and yet by no means uncomely. The capercaillie is polygamous, and all the cares of the young family rest with the mother, who lays from eight to sixteen eggs in a rude nest upon the ground, their colour being reddish-brown, spotted over with two shades of deeper colour. The young of both sexes resemble the mother till after their first moult, when the cocks begin to assume the male dress.

To see the Cock-of-the-Woods in all his glory, you should visit his haunts in the far forest in the early spring, while the snow still bends the boughs, in the month of February; when, high up in the trees, and the feathers of his head erected in form of a crest, he challenges the attention of the sober hens, and suggests

that the season of lovemaking and incubation are at hand.

> Amid the pine-wood's depth of shade
> Have ye watched the Capercaillie,
> With shining purple plumes outspread,
> And bold bright eye, o'erarched with red,
> Bow condescendingly his head,
> With his sober mate to dally?

If you have not, good reader, and brother sportsman, as probably I may call you, do not miss an opportunity when you have one. We do not all live in Scotland, or Norway, or Sweden, or betake ourselves to one or other of these countries every spring-tide; but, if perchance you happen to be within reach of capercaillies when in the spring "their fancies lightly turn to thoughts of love," as the Laureate says of other creatures, a day will be by no means lost in stalking the birds for mere observation's sake, with a binocular in your pocket. The stalking is not very difficult, and you may get within easy distance of *Urogallus*, so absorbed are his faculties, and so little his fear of man at this interesting crisis. Watch his singular "play," which is intended to draw the ladies of the neighbourhood to his amorous side. "During it," says Lloyd, "the neck is stretched out, his tail is raised and spread like a fan, his wings droop, his feathers are ruffed up, and, in

short, he resembles in appearance an angry turkey-cock. He begins his play with a call something resembling *peller-peller-peller;* these sounds he repeats at intervals, but as he proceeds they increase in rapidity, until at last, and after, perhaps, the lapse of a minute or so, he makes a sort of gulp in his throat, and finishing with sucking in, as it were, his breath. During the continuance of this latter process, which only lasts a few seconds, the head of the capercaillie is thrown up, his eyes are partially closed, and his whole appearance would denote that he is worked up in an agony of passion. The females within hearing make answer with a cry, which has been compared to the croak of a raven, and can only be represented in print by the words *gock-gock-gock*; and with these unmusical sounds the woods for weeks are rife."

In olden days, capercaillies were common enough both in Ireland and Scotland. Hector Boetius mentions them in 1526, and numerous historical references to them are quoted from that time up to the latter half of the last century. Probably, however, before 1750 they had been extirpated in Ireland, and not many years after they came to an end in Scotland. Their final disappearance from the latter country may be dated about the year 1760, though

it is said that one was shot near Inverness in 1780. Their introduction into Scotland is a matter of considerable interest both to the sportsman and naturalist. The earliest attempt is associated with the name of the Earl of Fife, in 1827-28, at Braemar, who raised some poults from imported birds. But, practically, the re-introduction of this noble game bird dates from 1837-8, when birds from Sweden were turned down in the forests round Taymouth Castle, by the Marquis of Breadalbane. These increased and multiplied, and gradually established colonies in other districts by a process of emigration. The range of the capercaillie, taking Taymouth Castle as the starting point, now lies, roughly, between the North Esk river on the north-east, and Loch Lomond on the south-west, the Forest of Athole bounding it on the north-west, and the Firth of Forth on the south-east. A separate establishment of the species was made in Arran in 1843, from birds from Taymouth Castle woods, but owing to the limited area of wood, they have not increased to any great extent. Some difference of opinion exists in Scotland as to the desirability of cultivating, if I may use the term, these birds. Not a few persons hold that they do so much damage to the pines by picking out the terminal buds, and eating the young

shoots, which form their principal food, that their presence is to be deprecated. Hence, in some districts, and especially where planting is being extensively carried out, they are shot down without mercy when they make their appearance. Then, again, they have their enemies in those who hold that capercaillies gradually drive away blackgame, and who deal with them accordingly. What, therefore, may be the ultimate result of the re-introduction of this bird is doubtful; but, already, it has afforded in recent years considerable sport in various localities, and good bags have given proof of its successful re-establishment. Those who take an interest in this question cannot do better than make themselves acquainted with an admirable monograph of "The Capercaillie in Scotland," by J. A. Harvie-Brown, F.L.S., published by David Douglas, of Edinburgh, in which they will find a full account of the facts to which I have briefly alluded, and an excellent defence, based on evidence and reason, of the capercaillie, to the charges alleged against it.

There can be little doubt but that the great majority of sportsmen, especially of Englishmen who hie northward for sport in the autumn, would heartily rejoice in a still more abundant supply of the Cock-of-the-Woods.

Capercaillies, though they seek refuge in the trees, afford much better sport than some persons would suppose. It might be imagined, as a recent writer truly remarks, that the great size of the bird would render capercaillie shooting a not very difficult matter in the daytime. They are not, however, so easily brought down. The generality of covert shooting in Scotland is done in line, and as the birds perch high up in the tree-tops, they get a good view of the advancing enemy. They therefore rarely allow the latter to approach within fair gunshot, but take their flight in time, and always from the "other side" of the tree. Whether there is a special Providence to guide the capercaillie to perch on the reverse side of the tree to that which the gunner is approaching, or whether they take the precaution to move there on the first sound or sight of danger, seems doubtful; but it is believed that an instance of one departing from this very sensible practice is not within the ken of man. Very few are consequently killed in the ordinary drive, and even if they take flight within gun-shot, the swoop downwards which they always make at starting gives them such an impetus that they skim off on the "other side" at a pace that often carries them off at long range before a trigger can be pulled; then firing

had better be left alone, as it takes a good deal to bring these giants down. As they are polygamous, it is desirable, even while endeavours are being made to increase the number of the species, to kill off a good many of the cocks. A special arrangement, not altogether for the benefit of the latter, is on this account made by sending on a gun or two to wait in a concealed spot and in a favourable position while the beaters and the other guns drive up towards them from the other end of the beat. This is the only way in which a capercaillie can be fairly circumvented, and, although his trick of dodging out on the other side saves him from his approaching enemies, he has to run the gauntlet of his foes in ambush. These watch him as he comes swiftly skimming along between the trunks of the tall pines, looking, with his hooked beak, more like a large bird of prey than anything else, and salute him at 20 or 30 yards with a charge of No. 1, or, better still, of B B shot. Down he comes with a ponderous thud on the ground, or, if there is deep snow, his great weight plunges him into the drift, completely burying him therein—a truly royal burial for such royal game.

By all means, then, let the re-establishment of these grand wood grouse go on. The modern system of

planting large districts of the Scottish Highlands with fir is greatly in its favour; and a familiar sight may yet be

> The giant grouse, where boastful he displays
> His breast of varying green, and crows and claps
> His glossy wings. . . .

For the present, however, the capercaillie is a *rara avis* as far as the generality of sportsmen on Scottish shootings are concerned; but of late years few of us have been unfamiliar with his appearance as presented at the poulterers' shops in the metropolis and provincial towns—a poor bundle of lifeless feathers indeed, by no means attractive, and little suggestive of the bird in his living majesty. The capercaillies of commerce come mainly from Norway and Sweden, few Scotch birds crossing the border. In 1879 they were cheaper than ever I remember them, a good cock bird being procurable for five shillings, and a hen for sixpence less. In flavour they are not equal to the red grouse, but still excellent birds, when kept for a judicious period, "roasted to a turn," and served with bread sauce. Like the hen pheasant the hen capercaillie is more tender and of more refined flavour than the cock; and as a matter of taste I think that, like pheasants, capercaillies are better eaten cold than hot.

Let us now pass on to Black Grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*),

though I need not attempt to discuss them at any very great length from a sporting point of view. They are not, except in certain districts and at certain times, the special quarry of the sportsman intent on grouse shooting. Legally, they may be killed on the 20th of August, but, doubtless, on the 12th, when they are sprung, they fall "by mistake" to the breechloaders, in company with their congeners the red grouse, just as, "by mistake," outlying pheasants often find their way into the game bag during the partridge shooting of September.

Ornithologically, the Blackcock is a bird of character, and in saying a few words about him I must be ungallant enough to say still less about his sober mate the Grey-hen, though, by the way, as he is a polygamous creature, unlike his more proper cousin, the red grouse, he is hardly entitled to be called mated at all. Like the hen capercaillie, the grey-hen is but a dull, sober, mottled creature, and barred with dusky red and black above and below, and smaller than the blackcock, which often weighs as much as 4lbs. The latter is indeed a bonnie bird, and noble looking when in full fettle and plumage. His chief colour is a handsome black, with a glossy blue over the neck and back; the wing-coverts are brownish,

with the greater coverts white, forming a white spot on the shoulder when the wing is closed. The tail is black and much forked, or rather "fluked," so as to resemble a classic lyre; and hence the bird is called by some naturalists *Lyrurus*. Above the eye is the crimson spot common to the *Tetraonidæ* family, and below it there is a white streak. Altogether a handsomer bird one need hardly wish to look on, and when first killed is a very different spectacle from that which he presents after being packed in a hamper and hung outside a poulterer's shop. The time to see the young cocks at their best is when, intent on polygamy, they are preparing for internecine battles, in order to secure the largest harem of the sober-coloured hens. A graphic picture has been drawn by Sir Wm. Jardine of what may be observed on such occasions: "In the warmer sunny days, at the conclusion of winter and the commencement of spring, the males, after feeding, may be seen arranged on some turf-fence or rail pluming their wings, expanding their tails, and practising their love-call. If the weather now continues warm the flocks soon separate, and the males select some conspicuous spot, from whence they endeavour to drive all rivals and commence to display their arts to allure the females. Here, after perhaps

many battles have been fought and rivals vanquished, the noble full-dressed blackcock takes his stand. Commencing at the first dawn of day, and when the game is abundant, the hill on every side repeats the humming call. They strut around the spots selected, trailing their wings, inflating the throat and neck, and puffing up the plumage of these parts and the now brilliant wattle above the eyes, raising and expanding their tails, and displaying the beautifully contrasted white under tail covers. . . . . He is soon heard by the females, who crowd around their lord and master. This season of admiration does not last long. The females disperse to make their nests and hatch out their young; while the males, losing all gallantry and their feeling for love and fighting, seek the shelter of the brush and fern beds, and exhibit a degree of timidity the very reverse of their former boldness." A most interesting bird ornithologically is the blackcock, and it is a pity he is not as gastronomically excellent. He cannot compare in flavour with the red grouse or even ptarmigan, and, indeed, in the opinion of many learned *gourmets*, is hardly worth eating. His external beauties, however, are sufficient to make amends for the insipidity of his flesh; and no wonder that the poets have often taken

him as a subject for their verse. The following lines are probably familiar to most of my readers, who, as sportsmen or naturalists, are interested in this grand bird :—

> Have you heard the Blackcock's husky crow
> In the cool grey light of the morning,
> When the mists were on the vale below
> And the mountain tops were all aglow
> With ruddy beams that served to show
> The pathway of the dawning?

Burns has sung of the Black Grouse, and Johanna Baillie thus addresses it :—

> Good-morrow to thy sable beak
> And glossy plumage, dark and sleek ;
> Thy crimson moon and azure eye,
> Cock of the heath, so wildly shy !

At the beginning of the shooting season, however, though the old cocks are shy enough, the young ones are very tame and easily shot. The coveys are generally to be found in marshy places, where they feed upon the rush seeds, and they lie very close in this cover. But, as before intimated, blackgame shooting substantially differs little from ordinary red grouse shooting at its opening, when it is followed, as it seldom is, as a distinct sport. The scent of blackgame is strong, and is soon recognised by a steady dog. With care a whole brood may be got, as the young birds, like partridges in olden days, when

they had plenty of cover, lie close, and get up one by one. The grey-hen is very loth to rise, and you may often see her creeping about within a few yards of you, reminding you of the lines :—

> Have ye stooped among the heath and ling,
> To see the Grey-hen stealing,
> With her speckled pouts of tender wing,
> That closely to the covert cling,
> And fear to take the final spring,
> Their whereabouts revealing ?

But when she does get up it is with a terrible flutter, enough to unnerve any but a practised and seasoned sportsman. If you spring a covey out of shot they will not go very far at the beginning of the season, and in nine cases out of ten, with a fair amount of luck and skill, you may account for the majority of them. But what you are going to do in the way of "straightforward" blackcock shooting you must do quickly. As the season progresses, and the birds leave the sedgy moors for the outskirts of fields and the thickets, and become partly gregarious, they become also very wary, and have a habit of planting sentinels to give warning of the approach of danger. You have then to fall back on the "ambush" system in the early morning and late evening, and deliberately shoot them as they settle down on their

feeding grounds. This, however, is not a very dignified proceeding, but it is an acknowledged form of killing blackcock, and not tabooed as actually unsportsmanlike. Another method pursued is that of beating small coverts and woods for the birds, but it requires no little generalship to place the guns properly and give proper instructions to the beaters to make it a success. The birds know what is going on as well as you do, and manage to slip away with surprising adroitness. Then, again, there is the "stalking" system for birds in the open, more easily described than practised, like many other sporting operations. However, it may be done with success if you have a fair knowledge of the locality and are possessed of a good stock of patience and perseverance. There is something very attractive to most sportsmen in stalking anything, and to outwit a wary blackcock late in the season is a feat attended with infinitely more satisfaction than killing down most of a young brood in early days.

At the beginning of the season No. 6 is the best sized shot to use, but later on 5 and 4 should be brought into requisition, and it should be remembered that a hard-hitting gun is wanted, as a blackcock can carry away a lot of corns. The flight of blackgame is very peculiar; when seen on the wing at a distance, especially if the day

be a little misty, they very much resemble wild ducks, both in the form of their bodies and the motion of their wings. They fly with their heads and necks stretched out exactly like ducks, maintaining a steady determined sort of flight. I remember that the first blackgame I ever saw on the wing was on a foggy morning, on some moorland in North Devon. For a long time nothing would satisfy me that they were not mallards. By the way, as they are much in the habit of following each other in the same track, by standing still when they are disturbed on some neighbouring shooting, you may often get three or four shots in succession. But this is later on in the season. At the opening sportsmen will content themselves with working the young broods, the cocks of which may be distinguished, when flying, by the white feathers in their tails, for in other respects their plumage is very similar to that of the old hens. To bring down an old cock, however, is the best and most satisfactory business, for in more than one particular the old cocks are most undesirable birds to leave on a shooting.

The Black Grouse are more widely distributed than either of the other species, as they have an extensive range over Europe in the temperate districts, and are also found in abundance in Norway and Sweden. In

these islands also they are found in many more localities than is the red grouse, the latter not having become acclimatised in England lower than Derbyshire and Staffordshire, notwithstanding several attempts to introduce it into Cornwall and Devonshire and elsewhere, whereas the black grouse still hold their own in some parts of Devonshire, Somersetshire, Hampshire, and other heath and moor districts of England. Almost all the hilly districts of Scotland hold them, and their range extends as far up as Sutherlandshire, and into the islands of Mull and Skye. They occur but rarely in Ireland. The black grouse, though so nearly allied to the red, strangely enough do not mix with the latter; and, indeed, they are rather enemies one to the other, and, like trout and grayling in the same river, do not seem to flourish in close contiguity, the black grouse, in the opinion of many game preservers, dominating over the red and preventing their due increase. However, it comes to pass, fortunately, that as their food is somewhat different, so they are disposed to frequent different parts of an extensive moor, the black grouse preferring the more swampy lands with rank vegetation, where they find food more congenial to them and a more abundant supply of water than their red cousins require. Still, in a day's shooting over

an extensive tract, the blacks and the reds get pretty well mingled after they have been disturbed, and on many moors sportsmen will find that the chance is about equal, each time their dogs stand, whether they will get a shot at black or red game. A peculiar feature in the natural history of the black grouse is that, comparatively speaking, it is free from the disease or diseases which from time to time cause such sad havoc among the red species —a fact which may be accounted for partly because it does not depend mainly on the heather for its food, and partly because the male parents of the young birds are the victorious cocks, and so the most vigorous males, in the annual battles for the females before the breeding season.

Blackgame have a strong tendency to interbreed with other species of the same order or family, and crosses with the pheasant, the capercaillie, the ptarmigan, and the barn-door fowl have been noted, and some have been figured by Yarrell in his "History of British Birds." Rarely, however, has a cross been observed between the black-game and red grouse, for the latter, being strictly monogamous birds, are less likely than the other kind of grouse to produce hybrids.

In some districts of Scotland of late years, there has

been a visible decrease of blackgame, a state of things to be attributable partly to extensive drainage and the improvement of rough land, and partly to the various devices for shooting the bird from ambuscades, which practices in several localities have almost brought about the entire extermination of the species.

The Ptarmigan, from an ornithological point of view, is perhaps the most interesting of the *Tetraonidæ*, though, like the capercaillie and the black grouse, it is not an object for sport on the 12th August, and it is not often indeed that it is specially sought after by sportsmen. It is called, as I have already said, *Lagopus mutus*, from the fact of its changing its plumage, or *albus*, the latter term designating it the White Grouse, in contradistinction to the black and the red grouse. Ornithological authorities, indeed, vary their nomenclature, and by some the bird is termed *Lagopus vulgaris*, and by others *Tetrao lagopus*. The word ptarmigan is a slight modification of the Gaelic name *tarmachan*, and it is as the ptarmigan that the bird is best known.

The Ptarmigan by nature is an inhabitant of Arctic regions, and abounds in the Scandinavian Peninsula and Iceland. How it came to us is a matter of some doubt, but the most plausible suggestion is that many years ago

some members of the species were blown to the Scotch coast in a gale of wind from the districts just mentioned. Some high authorities, however, maintain that our Scottish ptarmigan is really distinct from the foreign, and that its existence in North Britain is an evidence that, at some remote period, Scotland had a truly Arctic climate. Some years ago the ptarmigan was a dweller amid the hills of Cumberland and Westmoreland and some other parts of England, but now it is to be found no further southward than the Grampians. The further north you go among the Highlands the more plentiful does it become. It does not exist in Ireland, and, though once known in Wales, it has not, I believe, been seen there for more than half a century. In Scotland the snow-covered peaks and bare rocks, far above the heathery region inhabited by its relative, the red grouse, are the principal haunts of the bird. I well remember the delight with which I first beheld the ptarmigan, one fine morning in the late autumn—

> Sitting in her home sublime,
> High o'er cloudland's boundless sea—

at the top of one of the Grampian passes, while several in their winter garb flew over my head in company with their red cousins. A modern author, who combines in

his one person the rare qualifications of sportsman, litterateur, and gunmaker, Mr. J. D. Dougall, of Piccadilly and Glasgow, in a poem of singular beauty, thus speaks of the bird :—

Far up on desert mountains lone,
Where all is rock and cold grey stone,
Save where the hard and glist'ning snow
Mocks at the noon-sun's fiercest glow;
When nought of vegetable life
Can bear the elemental strife;
Nor track of foot nor sound of wing
The presence tells of living thing.

* * * * *

Yet can be found one creature fair,
To mark that breathing life is there—
The Ptarmigan!—whose kindred race
On Greenland's icy shores we trace,
Or by that Hyperborean bay,
Once hail'd as route for far Cathay—
Loves there to dwell, nor seeks to know
The placid scenes outstretched below;
Where, far beneath her cloud-girt nest,
The grouse and grey-hen seek their rest.
In vain the seasons come and go—
In vain for her the wild heaths blow—
In vain fair spring, with flowery grace,
Would lure her from that barren place;
Summer in vain his glory pours,
And autumn opes his golden stores;
In vain fierce winter's ruthless gale
Would drive her to the shelter'd vale.
Her love of home these wiles disarms,
For her those deserts have their charms.

Oh let her there unharm'd remain,
Nor grudge her that poor, rude domain!
Rather rejoice, that unlike man,
The lone, but lovely Ptarmigan—
Pleased with her scanty mountain fare,
The open skies and ambient air—
Seems to our earth on purpose sent,
An emblem of sublime content,
To show how beauteous lives have thriven
On nought save penury and heaven!

Another poet, whose lines on the capercaillie and the blackcock and grey-hen I have already quoted, says :—

But have ye clomb the Alpine height,
'Mid rock and snowdrift, seeking
The Ptarmigan with plumage white,
That crouches, hidden from the sight,
Where scarce a sound by day or night
Upon the air is breaking?

And yet once more, a writer, many years ago, in "Blackwood's Magazine," addresses the ptarmigan as—

Haunter of the herbless peak,
Habitant 'twixt earth and sky,
Snow white bird of bloodless beak,
Rushing wing, and rapid eye.

The pursuit of the common red grouse is, under many circumstances, toilsome enough; but he is indeed an ardent and hardy sportsman who endures and overcomes the many difficulties of penetrating those alpine solitudes

frequented by the ptarmigan, where there is hardly a sound of living creature to be heard but the scream of the eagle. However, in the opinion of many, the game is well worth the candle; and who shall say it is not? One of the great charms of sport is when success has been attained under special difficulties. I can, therefore, heartily sympathise with the Scotch naturalist, Macgillivray, a true son of

> The land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
> The land of mountain and the flood;

when he says: "I am much inclined to persuade myself that a brace of ptarmigans brought home, after a hard day's marching, from the craggy summit of some misty hill in the Gael land, could afford more pleasure than a whole thicket full of pheasants."

The change of plumage undergone by the ptarmigan as the winter approaches is a phenomenon of great interest to the naturalist. It is difficult to describe the marking of the bird in the summer. It is a mixture of black, yellow, white, and grey, exactly resembling the variety of colour of the mossy lichen-covered rocks and stones and patches of stunted heather, amid which it lies concealed from all but the most practised eyes during the summer and early autumn, while it gradually becomes

whiter as the season advances, and, at last, nearly assimilates itself to the snows of winter. Then the bird is pure white, except that the outer tail feathers, the shafts of the quills, and a streak from the eye to the beak are black. Thus there is a double provision for the safety of the ptarmigan in accordance with the season of the year. Moreover, the white plumage enables the bird to bear the rigours of the winter with greater comfort, in accordance with the well-known law that white objects reflect the heat more readily than darker ones and radiate it more slowly. And there is yet another provision of Nature for the defence of the ptarmigan against cold, inasmuch as the plumage on the legs and toes, which in the summer is of a hair-like texture, becomes of a more furry and closer character, while the bill of the bird is almost hidden. Such is the "lone but lovely ptarmigan," which so loves the freedom of the mountains that it never breeds in captivity, nor indeed, lives long when subject to restraint.

Ptarmigan are monogamous, but evince a liking for forming into packs, which gradually break up in early spring when the pairing commences. Their nests are loosely constructed heaps of twigs and grass, and are generally found placed under some projecting stone,

stunted bush, or tuft of mountain herbage ; and their complement on an average from ten to a dozen eggs, of a reddish white spotted with brown.

It requires considerable tetraonic enthusiasm to say much in favour of the flesh of the ptarmigan. It is vastly inferior to that of the red grouse. However, it is edible, and the tens of thousands of ptarmigan which are now imported from northern Europe, particularly from Sweden and Norway, find a ready sale in London and elsewhere at the moderate prices which are asked.

The Red Grouse, *Lagopus scoticus*, as termed by Macgillivray, from both a sporting and gastronomic point of view, is the most important of the four species of *Tetraonidæ* which are found in this country. It is the grouse *par excellence* ; and enjoys a multitude of names. By some it is called the Brown Ptarmigan, in accordance with the view that it is only a "low country" ptarmigan, just as there are low country brown hares and mountain white ones. Moor or muir fowls, moor cock and hen, and gorcock are more local and familiar titles ; while, again, it is the *Tetrao scoticus* of Linnæus, Latham, Temminck, and others, and the *L'Altagas* of Buffon. The generic term of *Lagopus* signifies "haresfoot," and like the white ptarmigan, the red grouse has not only

feathered tarsi, but its feet are covered with thick short plumage.

We may claim the red grouse to be one of the indigenous fauna of these islands, being found in England, Scotland, and Ireland, but not on the Continent or elsewere. Hence the suggestion that its specific name should be *Britannicus*; but its greater abundance north of the Tweed than in England or Ireland fairly entitles Scotland to the compliment of having it named after the land of heather. In England, Staffordshire and Derbyshire are the southern limits of its range, and and as the reclamation of waste land in these counties advances it is inevitable that the grouse will gradually retire northwards. Attempts to acclimatise the birds farther south have hitherto failed; for instance, on Dartmoor, in Devonshire, and on the Cornish moors, but, possibly, with perseverance, success might eventually be attained. The result of the experiment made by the Prince of Wales in 1879 to acclimatise the red grouse on his estate at Sandringham was looked forward to with considerable interest, and as North Norfolk is a great deal farther to the north than Devonshire and Cornwall, and indeed is almost on the same parallel with the grouse districts of Derbyshire and Staffordshire, there seemed a

good hope that the attempt would succeed. The doubt was whether the heath tracts of Sandringham and the neighbourhood were sufficiently extensive and hilly for the birds to take kindly to, as a considerable range of open mountain and heathery moorland seem necessary to their existence. They love not woods of birch and reedy swamps, like the blackcock, nor dark pine forests, like the capercaillie; and although they do not retire so far from the haunts of men as the ptarmigan in the higher alpine regions, yet they must have "ample scope and verge enough" for flight and feeding ground. Unfortunately the Sandringham experiment did not succeed, as we were informed by Dr. Macdonald, in the autumn of 1879. The fourteen brace of birds, procured from Aberdeenshire, only produced two covies, of which one entirely perished, and the other was greatly reduced in numbers, owing to foul play. It is just possible that the experiment would have shown a better result if Staffordshire, Derbyshire or Yorkshire grouse had been obtained, rather than birds from the north of Scotland. Perhaps, after all, the idea of extending the red grouse southward had better be given up, and attention turned to the acclimatisation of the Pinnated grouse (*Cupido cupidonia*), of America, which would be likely to do well among us.

A handsome bird is the cock red grouse when fully grown and in full season. His plumage is a rich sienna brown, beautifully waved and mottled, and shaded with lighter tints, the throat sometimes assuming a coppery hue, and the belly deepening into black, or nearly so. The feathers of the tail, which are not forked like those of the blackcock, are brown, barred and edged with red. It has the same rough scarlet spot over the eyes as the other members of the grouse family, and the legs are almost white, offering a strange contrast to the rest of the plumage. Those who only know the bird as he hangs in the poulterers' shops, or as taken from the hamper, however carefully packed, can have little idea of his beauty when first killed and not much mangled with shot. The first grouse I ever killed was a grand cock bird, in Chapel-le-Dale, Yorkshire, when "driving." He was hit in some way which caused him to tower a little, and, with a gentle fluttering of his wings, he fell within my rampart about a yard from me. So beautiful was he that I could hardly identify him with the grouse of our shops. The female is of duller shades than the male. In the early part of the year, as the breeding season approaches, the colours of both the cock and hen become brighter and more distinct.

It is a curious fact that the red grouse vary considerably in both size and colour in different districts. In Argyleshire, for instance, they are larger and brighter than in most other localities, but they are still larger and redder in the most western highlands. In Perthshire they are much smaller and darker. In Yorkshire and other English moors, and in the Scotch lowlands, they are of a much lighter shade than the more northern birds. The rule seems to be that the brighter and more abundant the heather the brighter the birds. Indeed, it may almost be said of grouse that the birds vary on each moor, just as the trout do in different streams. I noticed some years ago that in a not very broad Yorkshire valley the birds bred on one side varied from those bred on the other.

Unlike the black grouse, the red grouse are strictly monogamous; but the cock, to his discredit, does not appear to attend to his parental duties in reference to the young brood as assiduously as some male birds do; but both the male and female will fight boldly in defence of their chicks when attacked by various kinds of "vermin." The red grouse make but a rude nest of dried grass, leaves, and other handy odds and ends, in some slight rocky or sandy hollow beneath

a turf of heather or low bush, and the female lays from eight to fourteen eggs of a dingy white colour spotted with brown. Like partridges, the red grouse seem attached to the spot where they are hatched, and do not wander very far from it unless much disturbed.

Various berries, mountain and moorland plants, but particularly the young shoots of the heather, form the common food of the red grouse; but when cultivated lands are near their haunts, they will often visit the cornfields and "stooks," and make the farmer contribute to their maintenance.

Altogether the red grouse are most interesting birds, and as good gastronomically as they are interesting ornithologically, and prolific of grand sport for the gun. It is somewhat strange that our French neighbours do not seem to appreciate grouse flesh as much as we do, and even shrink from the bitter back, which the English *gourmet* so highly prizes. We need not, however, lament over what we feel to be their lack of good taste, as it checks the exportation of the bird. If ever it becomes as popular in Paris as it is in London, the result will be an increase of prices, which, even in good years, are sufficiently high to make a brace of grouse out of reach of ordinary mortals.

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the glories of grouse shooting, and the difficulties connected with it in no slight degree enhance its enjoyment to healthy minds and genuine sportsmen. Moreover, the large amount of positive enjoyment which attends the pursuit of game in the wild solitudes of nature, amid which the grouse are to be found, imparts to this game an increased value in the eyes of the lover of natural scenery. There is a wild delirious kind of delight in breathing pure fresh mountain air amid the wide wild moors, that richly rewards the grouse shooter for his hardships and privations. He has his trials and labours, sure enough; his toilsome climbing up steep ascents and long, long walks over interminable moorlands; desperate encounters with armies of old Scotia's emblems, the rough and sturdy thistles, and gorse and juniper bushes; his wadings through burns and rivulets; the rain and mountain mist, and fog that wraps him about like a damp garment, as he goes ranging, as Craven has it, "up to his loins in a sort of vegetable ocean;" and the broiling sun on cloudless days, when

> The silent hills and forest tops seem reeling in the heat,

when the gun-stock almost blisters the hand, and the skin peels from the face, and "the perspiration" trickles

down in a continuous stream;—but what are all these drawbacks, difficulties, and labours compared with the genuine enjoyment experienced by the free ranger of the hills and moors? He knows joys which only sportsmen wot of:

> Though sluggards deem it but a foolish chase,
> And marvel men should quit their easy chair,
> The toilsome way and long, long leagues to trace;
> Oh! there is sweetness in the mountain air,
> And life, which bloated ease can never hope to share.

Many a brain-worker from the Senate, the Bar, and other callings, many a harassed "City man," and many an idler for the greater part of the twelve months, adds years to his life by the wholesome work and unique excitement of grouse shooting. Released from the ties and cares of business, from the strain of intellectual work, from the tiresome conventionalities and exactions of "society," or from whatever has held him fast week after week, and wearied him out soul and body, there is no man in the world who experiences such an intense and pleasurable feeling of relief as the fortunate mortal arrived at his shooting box, as, gazing forth on the wide expanse of blooming heather which is about to yield him the most charming of sport, he fain would shout at the very top of his voice—

> The moors! the moors; the spreading moors!
> The purple seas that have no shores!
> The hills sublime
> Who would not climb,
> All in this golden autumn time?

A happy man indeed; his happiness being increased by the inward consciousness that there is little to be said against his pastime. Grouse shooting is a genuine sport, fair and legitimate in every aspect; and to secure success even over a well stocked moor a man must have a good pair of legs, a true sportsman's patience and perseverance, and be a fair shot. Certainly, after the first few days are over, and the cream of the shooting, as far as many and easy shots are concerned, has been taken off, and the birds have become wilder, it is about an equal contest between them and the gun, and even with the modern improvement in our arms of precision it takes a good sportsman all his time to make a fair bag. His sport, too, as I have said, escapes the adverse criticism so freely launched at some other kinds of shooting. The grouse shooter is but little scolded. He is not as the man who shoots pigeons, or pheasants, or even partridges. He is not as the deerstalker, who is accused of having been instrumental in robbing the poor man of his mutton; neither is he as the sportsman who goes to India,

Ceylon, or Africa, and destroys "big game" merely because it is big. Each and all of these are perpetually getting into trouble with one section or other of the public. The slayer of pheasants, for instance, is told that his quarry is too tame and that he kills too many; that he is either a butcher or a henwife, and, in fact, no sportsman at all. The deerstalker, again, "gets it hot," and may almost be said to be troubled with a consciousness of his own guilt. He is often told that if there were no deer in the forest there would be sheep, and possibly Scotchmen; but then he is aware, too, that he could not shoot Scotchmen or sheep, and so he persists in his wickedness, drawing down the maledictions of professed philanthropists and political economists of the philosophical school on his head. The grouse shooter has no such qualms to get over, or unpleasant reflections to push aside. There is not a lamb less on the hills or a chop less in the market because of this sport.

But, *per contra*, there is no little disappointment and vexation occasionally attendant on grouse shooting. The shooting-box in the Highlands does not always come up to the pleasant dream previously indulged in, and the shooting sometimes turns out a delusion and snare. The box itself is often found to be a dreary tenement, standing

treeless, gardenless, flowerless, on the barren road side, the very picture of desolation even on a bright day. It is often very bare of even necessary furniture, and perhaps not even watertight. Nothing cheerful, nothing snug or cosy; and if, as happens from time to time the weather prevents the tenant from putting his nose outside, a more pitiable prisoner than he can hardly be conceived. The commissariat, too, sometimes breaks down, and as the box may be a considerable number of "miles from a lemon," as Sydney Smith once described a remote country place, many wants have to be endured rather than supplied. All this, however, may be put up with if the sport be good; but here, also, there is often the most grievous breakdown of all. There is grouse shooting and grouse shooting. The morning of the 12th has broken, and the day arrived for testing the truth of the representations of the lessor and the reports of the keepers which have been so favourable for weeks past. The dogs are slipped, and they shoot off at a dash as if they mean to stop at nothing this side of the horizon. They work miles of ground, and the guns plod along wearily. No point, not even a draw. A wary old cock grouse or two is flushed, which fly off with a crow of derision; but practically the moor is barren! Here is

vanity and vexation of spirit. The dreams, anticipations, and hopes of the sportsman are shattered. In vain all the trouble and expense to which he has put himself, for hardly a feather can be got. He cannot endure the disappointment with equanimity. No one could. It is all very well to say that men go northward for change of scene and air, for wholesome exercise, for rest, and a thousand other things. Yes; but *imprimis* they go for grouse, and if they do not get grouse they all feel annoyed, yea, exasperated, or they are fearfully and hopelessly depressed. There is the painful consciousness that they have assisted at a grand failure, that they have been stultified, perhaps victimised. If, in an average year and on a well-stocked moor, it costs the renter £2 per brace for all the grouse he kills, what must be the loss of the sportsman who kills next to nothing? As for the bitterness of his disappointment, that we can never appraise.

By September the birds get wild, and packing becomes general, especially if the weather be wet; and even before the first week's shooting is over it often happens that the birds can only be bagged by "driving." Much has been said and written against this practice, and also on behalf of it. I shall certainly not attempt a long and

learned disquisition on the debated subject. Those who wish to see it fully and ably discussed will find a long article on it in "Blackwood's Magazine," of March, 1873, which treats of the famous grouse season of the previous year. I have my own opinion, and hold that driving is compatible with genuine sportsmanship, and that the practice is perfectly legitimate. It is easy enough to decry it, but those who know what grouse driving really is, the difficulty of securing a good bag, even with the advantage it gives the gun, and the necessity for having recourse to it nowadays, when the birds are much wilder than in former times, are convinced of its legitimacy, and acknowledge it as a most enjoyable form of sport. It requires good generalship in arranging the beats and posting the guns, and carrying out all the details of the day's work, to say nothing of the excellency of aim required to stop birds which are flying from forty to fifty miles an hour, and often at a far greater rate when assisted by a strong wind. Add to all these and other considerations the fact that, in driving grouse when they have become too wild to shoot at the tails of "Sam" and "Sancho," the old birds, pugnacious cocks, and barren hens, the pests of the moor, fall equally to the gun, as do their children, grandchildren, nephews,

and nieces, and other members of younger generations. Moreover, a man who owns or rents a moor naturally wants to get a fair amount of game off it; and this he may fail to do by the so-called "legitimate" method of shooting, and yet there may be abundance of birds on his range. Why, then, should he not have a drive or two so that he may have the pleasure of sending a few brace to his friends, or even to market, in order to recoup some part of his expenses?

There are two points which I have always considered of prime importance in grouse shooting. The first is, not to begin shooting too early in the morning. The sport, indeed, holds forth fascination enough to draw the laziest sportsman from his bed soon after sunrise, but an early start is a mistake. If delayed till between nine and ten o'clock the birds will have had time to feed and settle down again in the heather; and as they lie best towards the afternoon and evening, there is plenty of time to make a good bag. Wild shooting at the outset is not likely to improve as the day goes on, and, however steady the dogs, birds are so restless at early morning that the best shots are apt to get flurried and fancy something is wrong with their shooting, when in reality they are not giving themselves a

fair chance. The second point is to refrain from working a moor in stormy weather, as it renders the birds wild and makes them pack earlier than should be the case. A forgetfulness of this at the beginning of the season often spoils the sport of ordinary shooting, and necessitates driving before its time.

My last remark on grouse will be a gastronomic one, in reference to the length of time that these birds will keep if hung in a cool place, where they are also exposed to a current of air. I was, in the year 1873, one of a party grouse driving in Chapel-le-Dale, Yorkshire, in the last week of December. As an experiment, two brace of the birds were kept till the first week of the following March, and then eaten. True, they had dried up to a very great extent, and it was found they had lost much of their natural flavour; but still they were not only eatable but fairly palatable.

PARTRIDGES.

PARTRIDGE SHOOTING.—*Mark, Down!*

PARTRIDGES.

It is hardly necessary to say that there is no sporting anniversary so popular as the First of September, partly because partridge shooting is a pastime which has more followers than any other of our field sports, and partly because the sport itself is, taking all things into consideration, the most enjoyable of all connected with the gun. There are three things needed for the perfect success of partridge shooting—a good supply of birds, good covert to shoot them in, and fine weather; but it is not always that the sportsman is fortunate enough to be favoured in all these respects. The weather in one sense he is indifferent to, but he must have a good supply of birds, or otherwise his sport is something like the play of Hamlet, with the part of the Danish prince omitted. But even if he has birds galore his sport is but indifferent and

his labour most irksome, unless also he has good cover in which to deal with them. Sometimes he has one and not the other; one year plenty of birds and no cover, and another year *vice versâ;* and this, after all, is what more or less may be expected, as a wet summer generally is destructive to the young birds, but conducive to super-abundance of green cover, and a dry summer favourable to the birds, but inimical to good cover. Now the year 1879, in which I wrote some of these notes on partridges, was the most unfortunate I ever remember for the partridge shooter, and this is why I have put it on record. The summer of 1861 was one of the wettest years on record, but it was a dry one when compared with 1879. In the last named year there were no birds, and (to use an Hibernicism) no green cover wherein to shoot what there were, for there was hardly a field of corn cut by September, and the green crops, deluged by rain and impoverished for want of sun, were thin and patchy.

The stock of birds left at the end of the previous season was above the average, and they did not appear to have suffered so much as might have been expected from the intense cold of the following winter. But the nesting season was one of the worst ever known. On all low lying grounds the nests were swamped by hundreds

during the almost continuous rain, which, combined with cold wind, caused much destruction among eggs even on the higher lands. There was a slight cessation of wet weather during the hatching time at the end of June, but the young broods which did come off had shortly afterwards to face a succession of downpours and much cold wind; and so it came to pass that many coveys were entirely obliterated or reduced to very small dimensions, in numerous instances only one or two young birds battling successfully against the adverse influences of the weather. The few coveys found by sportsmen during the first week of September were mainly the second hatchings, and would not be fit game for two or three weeks. With the exception of a few favoured districts, the reports from all quarters were the same, and on all sides was raised the same doleful cry of "No birds." A gentleman, writing to the *Times* a few days after the opening of the season, gave his experience by quoting statistics of the result of three days' shooting over 4000 acres in Essex as compared with the result of the two previous seasons over the same estate. In 1877, three guns in three days bagged 130 birds; in 1878, eighty birds; but on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd of last September, 1879, only thirty, and these *all*

old birds. My own experience in Essex and Kent was even sadder than this, for on the 1st, in Essex, a friend and myself only got four-and-a-half brace of old birds, and one brace of young ones, as against eighteen brace, mostly of young, in the previous year on the same ground; and in Kent, on the 4th, we walked for five hours without getting a shot over ground, where, at the beginning of the previous season, we put up one or more coveys in almost every field. The year 1879 will long be remembered as an *annus mirabilis* for many reasons, and among sportsmen as being practically without any partridge shooting. Indeed, on hundreds of shootings not a gun was fired.

Partridges, like grouse, belong to the order of Gallinæ, gallinaceous birds or "fowls," which some naturalists term "Rasores" or "Scrapers," from the habit peculiar to most members of scraping the earth in search of food. Macgillivray says that "the only general character distinctive of every species belonging to this group of birds is one derived from the digestive organs. A very large dilation of the œsophagus forming a crop, lying, when distended, on both sides of the neck, and such an enlargement of the cæca as to render their capacity at least half that of the intestine, occur together in no other birds."

Like the grouse also the partridges belong to the family of the *Tetraonidæ*, under which comes the sub-family of *Perdicinæ*, "partridges." The members of this sub-family are ornithologically described as having full and heavy bodies, short necks, and short, strong, and slightly curved beaks; while their heads are small and rather oblong, and their legs short and stout, covered with scales or feathers. They have full, soft compact plumage, generally of grey, brown, and dusky red colours, prettily mottled and blended so as to produce an harmonious effect. The *Perdicinæ* are pretty generally distributed over the world, but occur mostly in warm and temperate climates—yet strange to say, there are no true *Perdicinæ* in America. They live on vegetable substances, such as seeds, buds, and the herbaceous parts of plants, but they are also insectivorous. They are of a remarkably timid and retiring disposition, have a strong "whirring" flight, and are specially distinguished for their great powers of running. We have but two species in this country, the common and the French partridge. The common partridge is called by some naturalists, among whom may be mentioned Linnæus, *Tetrao perdix*, because, as I have said, it belongs to the superior family of the *Tetraonidæ*, and by others, such as Temminnell and Cuvier, *Perdix*

cinerea, or the ash-coloured or grey partridge. Craven assigns another colour in the lines—

> And *nut-brown* partridges are seen
> Gliding among the stubble screen.

Byron, also, in Canto XIII. of Don Juan, writes:

> The mellow autumn came, and with it came
> The promised party, to enjoy its sweets.
> The corn is cut, the manor full of game;
> The pointer ranges, and the sportsman beats
> In russet jacket—lynx-like is his aim;
> Full grows his bag, and wonderful his feats.
> Ah! *nut-brown* partridges! &c.

As to the term "Perdix," I felt some considerable etymological difficulty when first writing these notes, nor can I say that I feel altogether clear about it now, though, as in the case of *Tetrao*, as mentioned in the last chapter, a learned correspondent of *The Country* kindly came to my assistance. The word "Perdix" is of course the Latin writing of the Greek πέρδιξ, and we find the word in some form or other in most languages. It is, for instance, *perdrix* in French, and in Spanish *perdiz*; and I suppose there is little doubt but that our word "partridge," which in old English was *partryche* or *partrich*, is only a variety. But why "Perdix?" The correspondent in question first suggested that this was another case of onomatopæia, and that the name was given because it

"savoured of the sound made by the bird's wings when rising." Of course I could not accept this solution of the difficulty; but it reminds me that I have read or heard that Irish partridges generally spring without uttering any vocal sound, while Scotch coveys shriek with all their might. I wonder whether there are any grounds for this statement. I never shot partridges in Ireland, and therefore I cannot speak of my own knowledge as to their silence or otherwise; but certainly I never noticed that Scotch partridges were more noisy than English birds when flushed. The correspondent referred to then followed on with the subjoined erudite communication:

"According to Planche (Thesauraus linguæ græcæ), Vendel-Heyl and Alexr. Pillon (Dictionnaire Complet de la Langue grecque), and Cornelius Schrevelius (Lexicon manuale græco-latinum), the word is itself a root. The last-named lexicographer does, indeed, offer a half sort of suggestion that it may possibly be derived from all but obsolete περιείδω (more likely, in my own opinion, from περιοράω), to look around, to look sharp, to be on one's guard—a word strictly applicable to the modern partridge, at least. Having learned so little from the different lexicons I have consulted, it seems useless to have recourse to modern authorities. Nevertheless, not to leave

a stone unturned, I will question one or two of them. What has Napoléon Laudais to say on the subject? 'Oiseau de la famille des Alectrides, dont la chair est fort estimée.' So much for his notion of etymology. What say our Italian oracles? 'Pernice; uccello di carne squisita.' Now for our English oracles:—'Partridge: from *perdix*; French, *perdrix*, &c., &c., a dainty fowl' ('Universal Etymological Dictionary,' by N. Bailey, φιλολογος, published in 1742). And what has Doctor Ogilvie to say on the subject? 'Partridge: French, *perdrix*; Spanish, *perdiz*; Dutch, *patrijis*; Irish, *pitrisg*, derived from the Greek word πέρδω, pedo. The partridge is a well-known bird of game, so named from the sound it utters' (Etymological English Dictionary, by John Ogilvie, L.L.D., Blackie and Sons, London, Edinburgh, and Glasgow). Eureka! Eureka! The Aberdonian philologist does not tell us whether it utters the sound on rising from the ground or when it wishes to cause the scattered members of a covey to rejoin—in sportsman's language, to 'call.' In my opinion, 'tzick-tzick,' or even 'tesick,' does not imitate the 'call' of a partridge, so well as 'karr-hay, carr-hay,' or 'haix.' So fully persuaded is the Breton sportsman that the bird *par excellence* calls as above, that he assures you that Carhaix (a town in Lower

Brittany) was so named from the calling of the immense number of partridges that existed near it. The French sportsmen sometimes represent the call of their game birds phonetically. For instance, they make the red bird cry 'kid-kid-ra, que de sillons! et da capo;' the quail cry 'fouette tabac, fouette tabac.'"

This was interesting enough, but I could not gather from it what was the conclusion come to by the correspondent. The *περιείδω* suggestion is manifestly absurd; as is also, I think, that of *πέρδω*, pedo, whether the sound alleged to be emitted is connected with the head or the tail of the bird. A favourite dictionary of mine (Richardson), however, solemnly supports the *πέρδω* suggestion, and connecting it with the vocal utterance of the bird, says: "Περδιξ, *ἀπο του πέρδειν*, *crepitum ventris edere*; the voice or cry of this bird, resembling the sound, "*cacantium et crepitum ventris emittentium.*" This I must decline to translate, for the same reason that some of the commissioners who investigated the state of the monasteries in Henry VIII.'s time drew up their reports in Latin in preference to English. I suppose I must fall back on the onomatopæia solution, and believe that "Perdix" represents in some way or other the cry or call of the bird, whether we take that cry as represented

by "tzick," "tesich," "karr-hay," or "haix." But "yet I am not happy." I am indebted, however, to the correspondent for an interesting note on artificial partridge "calls." He says:

"An Irish shooter—half-gentleman, half-buckeen, half-sportsman, and rather more than half-poacher—presented me with a perfect partridge 'call,' which never failed to elicit a response from birds any way near. It consisted of a thimble open at both ends—I believe tailors make use of such a thimble; over one end was securely tied a piece of parchment, through which was passed a horse's hair, well rubbed with resin. When the forefinger and thumb were passed properly down this hair the partridge's cry or call was imitated to the life. I sent the 'call' to a friend for inspection only, but he forgot to return it."

There is little need to attempt to describe

The Partridge with his horse-shoe breast,

or his horse-shoeless mate; and this word "mate" reminds me that I should at once pay a tribute to partridges for their strict monogamous principles. I am inclined to believe that not only do partridges pair for the season, but that they remain paired till death doth them part, though if either of the perdicine couple becomes widow

or widower I am not at all sure that they are particular about contracting marriages within the proscribed degrees of consanguinity and affinity. Indeed, it is more than probable that, as partridges keep pretty much to the same ground, the constant inter-marriages, or in-breeding, tends to deteriorate the stock, which would benefit by the occasional introduction of new blood.

From of old the timidity of the partridge has been noticed, and Spenser, in his "Fairy Queen," speaks of "the fearefull partridge," but a curious feature in the habits of the bird is the fact that, though a wild shy bird, it selects generally for its haunts the most highly cultivated parts of the country, and seems to increase in exact proportion to the care and attention bestowed on tillage of the soil. This is a remarkable circumstance, and, I should think, without parallel in the history of any of the animals indigenous to this or any other country. Some of the best shooting I ever had was in highly cultivated market gardens in Essex, within ten miles of London, among "greens," parsnips, carrots, parsley, onions, and asparagus beds. But they thrive well on ordinary farm lands, and also in less uncultivated districts if the soil suits them. Grahame thus writes of the haunts and habits of the bird :

But let me quit this scene, and bend my way
Back to the inland vales, and up the heights
(Erst by the plough usurp'd), where now the heath,
Thin scatter'd up and down, blooming begins
To re-appear. Stillness, heart-soothing, reigns,
Save, now and then, the Partridge's late call;
Featly athwart the ridge she runs, now seen,
Now in the furrow hid; then, screaming, springs,
Joined by her mate, and to the grass-field flies;
There, 'neath the blade, rudely she forms
Her shallow nest, humble as is the lark's,
But thrice more numerous her freckled store.
Careful she turns them to her breast, and soft
With lightest pressure sits, scarce to be moved;
Yes, she will sit, regardless of the scythe,
That nearer, and still nearer, sweep by sweep,
Levels the swathe; bold with a mother's fears,
She, faithful to the last, maintains her post,
And with her blood sprinkles a deeper red
Upon the falling blossoms of the field;
While others of her kind, content to haunt
The upland ferny braes remote from man,
Behold a plenteous brood burst from the shell,
And run; but soon, poor helpless things, return,
And crowd beneath the fond inviting breast,
And wings outstretching, quiv'ring with delight,
They grow apace; but still not far they range,
Still on their pinions plumes begin to shoot;
Then, by the wary parents led, they dare
To skirt the earing crofts; at last, full-fledged,
They try their timorous wings, bending their flight
Home to their natal spot, and pant amid the ferns.
Oft by the side of sheepfold, on the ground
Bared by the frequent hoof, they love to lie
And bask. Oh, I could never tire to look
On such a scene of peacefulness as this.

The partridge is indigenous to this country, and may be called a truly national bird, or, as I believe an eminent naturalist has described it, "a veritable autochthon in feathers." A young cock bird in October or November, when the chestnut "horseshoe" has fully developed on his breast, may vie with almost any other bird in this country for beauty and symmetry.

The nest of the partridge, like those of most of the gallinæ tribe, is by no means an elaborate affair, being composed of odds and ends of dry rubbish, and sunk in some hollow in the ground. Sometimes nests are found in the cornfields, but more frequently in meadows laid up for hay; more frequently still, however, in some hedge bank, and strangely enough not seldom very near a public foot path. The eggs, which may be described as of a dull coffee colour or olive, vary from twelve to twenty in number, and are generally hatched within a day or two on one side or other of Midsummer Day. The tenacity with which the hen sits on her eggs is unsurpassed by that of any other bird, and it is by no means an uncommon occurrence for her to fall a victim to the mower's scythe. This is alluded to in Grahame's lines just quoted; and Mant, who may be called the "Bishop of Birds," has the following:

Here, as the swarthy mowers pass
Slow through the tall and russet grass,
In marshall'd rank, from side to side,
With circling stroke and measur'd stride,
Before the scythe's wide sweeping sway
The russet meadows tall array
Falls, and the bristly surface straws
With the brown swathe's successive rows.
Ah, take thy heed, nor on her nest
The partridge ill-secur'd molest.
Deep in the grass behold her sit;
Reluctant from her couch to flit,
Though the stout mower's whistling blade,
Incautious, her abode invade,
And threaten, 'mid the falling heap,
Away herself and brood to sweep.

Few birds, too, are more assiduous in their attention to their young, and the manner in which the old ones will pretend to be wounded, and flutter along just in front of their disturber in order to distract his attention from their nest or young brood has often been described. Marwick, in a note to my edition of "White's Selborne," gives the following account: "It is not uncommon to see an old partridge feign itself wounded, and run along on the ground fluttering and crying before either dog or man, to draw them away from its helpless unfledged young ones. I have seen it often, and once in particular, I saw a remarkable instance of the old bird's solicitude to save its brood. As I was hunting with a young pointer, the

dog ran on a brood of very small partridges, the old bird cried, fluttered, and ran, stumbling along just before the dog's nose, till she had drawn him to a considerable distance, when she took wing, and flew still further off, but not out of the field; on this the dog returned to me, near the place the young ones lay concealed in the grass, which the old bird no sooner perceived than she flew back again to us, settled just before the dog's nose again, and, by rolling and stumbling about, drew off his attention from her young, and thus preserved her brood a second time. I have also seen when a kite has been hovering over a covey of young partridges, the old birds fly up at the bird of prey, screaming and fighting with all their might to preserve their brood."

This habit of the partridge is a most marvellous instance of instinct, which in this case seems to border very closely on reason. All partridges have recourse to this device when needed, and they all act their part most admirably. Jesse gives a very interesting account of partridges saving their eggs from destruction. He says that a gentleman, who was overlooking his ploughman, saw a partridge rise from her nest, almost crushed by the horses' hoofs. Being certain that the next furrow would bury the nest and eggs, he watched for the return of the

plough from the other side of the field. In the meanwhile the hen, assisted by the cock, succeeded in removing the whole of the eggs, twenty-one in number, a distance of forty yards to a hedgerow, the operation taking twenty minutes. The hen bird resumed incubation, and eventually brought off nineteen young ones. Jesse also states that he knew the case of a farmer who constantly stroked an old bird as she was sitting on her nest. She seemed to have little or no fear, and would peck at his hand as he touched her.

Attempts have been made from time to time to reclaim partridges from their wild state and tame them in confinement, but very seldom have they succeeded; and, I believe, there are only two or three instances on record in which they have bred when confined. The hand-reared ones, however, become comparatively domesticated; and a few years ago I had some in my kitchen garden which, long after they were full grown, would allow anyone to approach within a yard or two of them. Gradually, however, they strayed away to join their wilder brethren in the field. "Scrutator," in his "Practical Lessons on Hunting and Sporting," gives the followfng account of some tame partridges: "A year or two ago," he says, "I reared a brood of partridges which became quite as

tame as pigeons. As the season advanced, the *pats*, as I used to call them, rambled away occasionally into a neighbouring farmer's stubble fields, from which, not having the exclusive right of shooting there, I was obliged to dislodge them; and, aided by my setter, their whereabouts was discovered, and the dog, knowing the birds as well as the birds knew the dog, both parties remained stationary until I approached them, when, on *desiring* the birds to walk home, they trotted on before us, through gates and hedges, chattering as if they thoroughly understood my meaning, but never attempted to take wing until they reached home; but, fearing at last that they might stray off once too often, I confined them to winter quarters in a large airy room. A neighbour, who was one day watching me feeding these birds, which would come round my feet and peck at my shoes, said, 'why don't you eat them, they look fat and plump?' 'Eat them!' I exclaimed, in astonishment; 'I would rather eat bread and cheese only for a month than kill one of these little pets, which look up to me as their foster-parent.'"

The other species of partridge we have among us is the "French," or as some call it the "Guernsey," partridge, *Perdix rufa, i.e.,* red (red legged) partridge.

It is a native of France and southern Europe, and there is some question as to the date of its introduction here. According to Daniel it was brought over from the Continent in the reign of Charles II., when several pairs were turned out about Windsor forest. Probably, however, there was no stock raised from these birds, and it was not till about sixty or seventy years ago that the red legged species was established in these islands. The account usually given, I believe, is that the Marquis of Hertford and Lord Rendlesham procured some eggs from the Channel Islands, set them under common hens, and when the young birds were reared, turned them out on their estates in Suffolk. It was from here that the breed extended itself into other parts of the country, but it is more than probable that our stock is replenished by birds occasionally finding their way here from the continent, as from time to time they are found on the coast in an exhausted state, which is suggestive of a weary journey over the water for birds which are not made for a long sustained flight. Sportsmen generally would gladly see them exterminated, as they tend to oust our own breed, and to spoil dogs through their persistent refusal to rise, "footing away," as Yarrell says, "before a pointer, like an old cock grouse." They are monogamous; but, unlike

the common partridge, they sometimes roost on trees, and it is said that occasionally they build in them. The nest, generally in a hollow on the ground, is like that of the common partridge, and from fourteen to twenty eggs, with reddish-brown spots on a drab ground, is its complement. The red is a bolder bird than the common partridge, and more capable of domestication. The beauty of its colouring is well known. Mr. Dougall and other sportsmen and naturalists speak of a smaller species of this bird, which they consider a distinct one, found on the cultivated edges of some Highland moors.

It is but little more than a hundred years ago since netting, not shooting, was the ordinary way of securing partridges, and prints are still extant of about that date in which we see the lord of the manor, in his laced hat, tie wig, flapped waistcoat, capacious coat, and high topped boots, riding over the stubble, and directing his servants who draw the net, while the dog, crouching close to earth, patiently submits to be inclosed therein along with the birds. When pointers and guns succeeded springs and nets, as springs and nets had succeeded falconry, it was long before shooting at flying game grew popular with sportsmen, or that they accomplished it with any fair degree of success. In the middle of the eighteenth

century it was said that in all Norfolk, then famous as a sporting country, there were not more than two sportsmen who could be regarded as good shots. This was, however, largely due to the imperfections of the gunsmith's work. The guns of that day would be fearful engines to a modern eye, terrible in their recoil, cumbrous in their size, awfully heavy, and requiring no little strength merely to pull their triggers. Several seconds invariably elapsed between the pulling of the trigger and the ignition of the priming in its spacious pan, and a bird could fly at least a dozen yards in the time thus occupied. So the small success our forefathers met with in shooting flying game was, after all, hardly a thing to wonder at; and yet what care they gave to these clumsy, lanky, point-heavy fowling pieces, and how choice they were in selecting them! How fond they were of the twisted barrels when they were first introduced, and what talk there was of the relative merits of the French "ribbon barrels" and the horseshoe barrels of Madrid, as contrasted with these same twisted English barrels, when they were twisted as they should be by means of anvil and hammers, and not by heat and the vice, as common gun barrels were. Curiously long in the barrels were those old fowling pieces, for it was believed that the distance the shot

would go depended upon the length of the tube it traversed before emerging from the muzzle, and the idea that short barrels would carry farther than long ones was at first scouted as a palpable absurdity. But these are things of the past, although amusing enough by way of contrast with things present, which are our immediate concern.

Now-a-days, what with the wondrous improvement in our fire-arms, and the corresponding improvement in the shooting of those that carry them, it goes very hard with the "little brown birds," especially at the beginning of the season, when there are hundreds and thousands of men who, with their "pins" and "centre fires," hardly ever miss a bird that gets up within thirty-five or forty yards, and a large contingent with their "choke bores," who make pretty sure of their game between fifty and sixty, and even over that. The poet of partridge shooting a century ago described how

> The fluttering coveys from the stubble rise,
> And on swift wing divide the sounding skies,

and the comparative accuracy with which

> The scattering lead pursues the certain sight,
> And death in thunder overtakes their flight.

But John Gay lived in an age when the single barrelled

fowling piece, with its flint and powder pan, warranted not to go off in damp weather, was looked on as the perfection of an arm of precision, which could never be surpassed, though it was necessary after pulling the trigger to follow the object aimed at for an appreciable number of seconds to ensure a right ultimate direction of the charge, and sportsmen were directed to utter a shrill whistle when a hare got up, so as to make it stop suddenly from fright and offer itself for a quiet pot shot. The birds had a fair enough chance of escape then; but now swift indeed must be their wings and sharp their small bright eyes, and extra crafty their ways to run the gauntlet of their enemies and escape the table and bread sauce. It might console them to their fate, if they were only capable of philosophic reflections, to meditate how large a part they play in our social arrangements. The ancients were greatly governed by the feathered race. Rome was built in obedience to the flight of eagles, and nothing important was ever undertaken in the forum or the camp without first consulting "the birds." But it might sweeten death to the *tetrao* or the *perdix* to think how they control the history of a greater empire than that of Rome or Greece, and a patriotic partridge, or a high-spirited cock grouse, might well resign itself to

"number six," with the proud consciousness that the Scotch bird dissolves the Imperial Parliament, and the English bird keeps thousands of Britons at home, and brings back thousands more to spend their money in these islands instead of lavishing it upon foreign hotel keepers and travel. People forget this service rendered by the coveys, when they merely count up the number of the slain, and calculate what they are worth as articles of food. The first of September fills all our country houses, and brings the chief holiday of each year to many a hard-worked professional man. The partridge is such a convenient little bird. For grouse one must go far a-field, and beat up mountain side and distant moorland; to shoot pheasants one must wait till October, and, as with Corinth, it is not the fortune of every man to arrive at the command of moors and covers; but the partridge is within easy reach of home and purse; he comes to perfection just when he is most wanted, when the harvest is cleared from the ground and the autumn is young, and rural scenery is at its prettiest. He rears himself, unlike the splendid but costly pheasants, does nobody any harm in the process, subsisting chiefly on insects which hurt the farmer, and berries of the wood-side, and a little shed corn; and, being wild enough to

give good sport, he is domesticated enough to live where he is hatched, and be found when he is wanted to fill the bag and grace the table. He is accordingly only too popular for his own peace and profit, and, like other humble *adscripti glebæ*, he pays more than his fair share for the soil on which he exists. An autumn of perpetual alarms, and a precarious winter of long shots, is the heavy price with which even the luckiest bird in the brood buys the quiet immunity of its spring and summer.

The advent of September, and the truly English sport with which it is associated, recalls many thousands from foreign travel, the seaside, their yachts, and even grouse moors, to their own houses, or partridge shooting quarters in the English counties; while from our cities and towns go forth the British shopkeepers, professional men, and others, who have been lucky enough to have got an invitation from some country friend, or possess money enough to rent a little bit of shooting for themselves. From Berwick-on-Tweed, or rather from John O'Groat's House to Land's End, everyone who is able to command a little sport among the birds ("the birds" *par excellence* of England) takes advantage of it, with the exception of a select few, who remain in their deer forests, or think it unfashionable to shoot partridges till October is well in.

Great are the anticipations and great the preparations for weeks beforehand, and young and old look forward to the return of a sport which never seems to lose its freshness. But, with such apparently terrible odds against the birds, it may be asked whether partridge shooting is real sport. Yes. Certainly it is pretty sport enough, and fits in charmingly with English rural life and English scenery. And after all the advantages which modern shot-guns give the partridge shooter, it still requires a good sportsman, even over well-stocked ground, to make a good bag. Speaking of sport in a former generation, an old writer says it is "very laborious, requiring perseverance and a good bottom." The requirements are the same now; and partridge shooting, to be successful, still demands care, perseverance, and other moral qualities which go to make up a good sportsman. It has also its special charms and attractions, which fully entitle it to be called sport. It may lack the intense excitement of deer-stalking, and some of the pleasurable accessories of grouse shooting, but it is free from what we may call the selfishness of the former, and too business like aspect, and, I would even dare to add, monotony of the latter. Partridge shooting is exciting enough, the birds being really harder to bring to bag than grouse. Though it is generally

pursued in districts which have no bold mountain and rock scenery, it is enjoyed amid a variety of aspects of nature not found in the monotony of many moors; and as each field differs from another in the quality of cover, it requires no little generalship to make a successful day, especially if your bounds are circumscribed, or your beat lies awkwardly in respect to a neighbour's rights.

Partridge shooting, too, has a distinctively social aspect; it is the occasion of gathering of friends in country houses, and of a pleasant mingling of classes in the fields—squires, farmers, and labourers—all more or less being brought into wholesome contact one with another. To make a good bag is a chief and legitimate object of the sport, but to spend a pleasant day in the fields in glorious autumn weather is by no means, generally speaking, a secondary one. It is a sport, too, in which friends join, by accompanying the sportsmen, marking the birds, carrying the game, and making themselves generally pleasant and useful. Nor are the ladies without their share in it; they, too, not only give their benediction to sportsmen who do not get up early in the morning (for which, by the way, there is no occasion), but often come into the fields to see a little sport, or join the party at the picnic luncheon, for which they have so carefully catered.

Without their pleasant presence and aid in carrying out the evening's social programme, a day's partridge shooting would not be complete. Perhaps at no time of the year, even Christmas not excepted, is an English home seen to better advantage, nor hospitality so thoroughly enjoyed, as in the partridge season.

A love of sport is inherent in Englishmen, from the deerstalker to the ratcatcher. And it is curious to note the contrast between the universal popularity of field sports and the partial unpopularity of game preserving. In a country like England you cannot have the one without the other. There can really be little more reason against a landowner's keeping partridges and pheasants on his estate than there is against his keeping ducks and chickens. It is only a question of degree. The former require rather more watching, and are consequently rather more of a temptation to the prowling thief; but it is perfectly well known whose they are, and there is not a poacher in the kingdom now-a-days who pursues his calling under any delusion upon this point. The real reason why shooting and game preserving are exposed to reproaches from which fishing and fox hunting are exempt, is the general notion that shooting is a more exclusive amusement than the other two—a remnant,

somehow or other, of the old feudal system, and connected with aristocratic privileges. It is needless to point out how absurd this notion is, and it is possible that if game were legally made *property,* something would be done towards removing it. The difficulty of identification has always seemed to be the great obstacle in the way of this measure; for who is to know when he has lost a covey of partridges, or who is to identify it when found? Removable or not, however, this prejudice is at the bottom of nearly all that is written or spoken against the game laws. But the partridge shooter may console himself with the reflection that comparatively little of it is directed against himself. It is a sport in which so many people are interested, that it is difficult to invest it with the odium of a class amusement. From the hard working lawyer who rents his 500 or 1000 acres, to the territorial magnate who can shoot over a quarter of a county, sportsmen of every calibre are supporters and protectors of the partridge. Tenant farmers, where they have the shooting, either indulge in it themselves or make money by letting it to others. Even the parson of the parish, pronounced ritualist though he be, has occasionally a shooting jacket among his vestments; and is not above a walk through the turnips in company with the churchwarden.

Grouse and pheasants cannot be had without a great deal more money; snipe, woodcock, and wildfowl without a great deal more time; and salmon rivers and trout streams are not to be found everywhere. Fox hunting is too expensive for some men, and too decidedly sporting for others; but partridge shooting costs comparatively little, and it is to be had in all parts of England almost at your own door. The partridge is as familiar to every English rustic as the rook or the wood pigeon; and partridge shooting is a sport which may be followed very quietly, and for two or three hours at a time, so as not to interfere with other duties. It seems to be a sport, too, which has a remarkable attraction for statesmen. Pitt, Fox, Peel, Palmerston, Lord Althorp, and the late Lord Derby, were all keen partridge shooters, and Lord Eldon's passion for the sport, and the number of birds he missed every time he went out, fill a large space in his biography. If partridge shooting, therefore, should ever lose its high position it will not be for want of interest or connection, and it may with safety be predicted that it has a long lease of life before it yet.

To many among us September recalls the memories of our boyish days and our first certificate. The country in that far away time was quieter than it is now. There

were fewer railways then, and no machines groaning in the distance like wounded giants. There was more repose about everything; and a man could go out shooting without that uncomfortable feeling of the public eye being upon him, which attends every action of our lives in the present day. The *laudator temporis acti* will tell you, too, that the weather was finer then than it is now, with many other pieces of information derogatory to the present age, for which, however, he is often indebted to his imagination rather than his memory. When every allowance is made for the effects of that natural antagonism between modern progress and the sports of the field for which some people contend, partridge shooting still remains a popular and healthy exercise; and, whatever change may have occurred in the seasons, September still remains one of the pleasantest months in the year. The overstrained nerves, the overwrought brain, and the languid muscles, which regain their proper tone after a week or two of September shooting, should make those among us who look down with contempt on all field sports indulgent to this particular one. Many people cannot undertake pedestrian tours. Mere "constitutionals" every day along the same roads and footpaths soon pall upon a man. And,

besides, for the full restoration of his health, an overworked man requires some excitement as well as exercise. This can be obtained in no way more easily, more pleasantly, or more conveniently than in partridge shooting. It is the best tonic in the world for those who cannot reach the moors. And, whosoever is in search of that greatest of all blessings, "the sound mind in the sound body," should, if he can handle a gun, lay the offering of his leisure on the shrine of gentle September.

And now I shall venture, I hope without giving offence to any brother sportsmen, to indite a few paragraphs of advice and suggestion, which may possibly be of use to some who handle the gun, whether as novices or veterans. First of all, a word about the sportsman's dress, for on this depends much for his comfort through a day's shooting. The covering for the feet is the most important item of all. Innumerable have been the shooting boots invented by enterprising makers during the last ten or fifteen years, with all kinds of fancy and classical and semi-classical names attached to them, and with all kinds of fastenings by means of straps, laces, buckles, and buttons. But, after all, nothing in my opinion beats the old-fashioned laced boots. Let them be of the best prepared leather, which is perfectly waterproof; let them

be of medium thickness, and not too heavy nor too light in the sole, for both extremes, though for different reasons, add to the distress of walking. Let them fit easily, and be laced just sufficiently tightly to make them feel part, so to speak, of the feet, which must neither be pinched nor be slipping about inside. If the boots have become hard from disuse, they should be softened before wearing. A hard wrinkle in the leather easily mars a day's pleasure. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of comfortable boots. With the reverse a day's shooting is pain and grief. And of almost equal importance are the socks ; in fact, they may be looked on as part of the boots. Let them be of wool, not cotton, and be well soaped inside with common yellow soap in a state of paste, with which also the feet themselves may be smeared before putting the socks on. This is the best preventative against blistering and chafing—better than astringents—and will keep the feet soft and even cool all the day. Knee breeches of some light material, full and baggy at the knee, not like hunting cords, but on the principle adopted by the navvies, who tie up their trousers to give the knees full play, should always be worn—knickerbockers, in fact, and below them gaiters of leather, or, better still, of coachman's drab cloth, which is fairly

waterproof, will turn thorns, and is of everlasting wear. The legs may be cooler without gaiters, but it is delicate work to get through hedges without them, and they prevent dirt, stones, and various other "foreign substances" getting into the boots and causing annoyance or necessitating the irritating process of unlacing and lacing up again. The shirt should be of flannel—there is no exception to this rule—and the coat and vest, or better, a Norfolk shooting jacket, of light texture and colour, the wideawake of ditto, or substitute for the latter, a straw hat and puggaree. I am aware this last head gear is rather showy, and considered unsportsmanlike, but I am giving advice to sportsmen with a special view to their comfort and well-being.

My next exhortation is not to start very early in the morning. It is all very well for boys with their first certificate

> To go to bed, and weep for downright sorrow,
> To think the night must pass before the morrow,

and to get up before daybreak, in order to be on the ground in the dim twilight, when the "early birds" are picking up their barley corns or wheat kernels on the dewy stubbles, and making their "morning calls;" but it is folly for sportsmen out of their teens. Nine o'clock is

early enough to make a start. The birds have got back into cover by that time and settled down for the day, and before seven in the evening there are hours enough left for making a toil of a pleasure, if anyone wishes to do so. I would say to the sportsman—eat a substantial breakfast, look through the morning papers, if you can get them, smoke your cigar or pipe in peace, and wait for the blessing of the ladies on your sport. And now you are off to the "happy hunting grounds." If they are at any great distance, never walk to them if you can ride; and before commencing proceedings register a few vows and keep them during the day. Let one be, to walk slowly; otherwise you soon tire yourself and often fail to do justice to your real powers as a marksman. Another, not to be jealous of your companion, or shoot unfairly at his birds, or wrangle over the game killed. 'My bird, I believe," is often the beginning of a quarrel. Register, too, a vow to keep your temper under all emergencies; do not get angry with your dog, with your keepers, markers, or with yourself. The loss of temper is often the loss of the enjoyment of a day's sport. Register also this vow—not to smoke, or drink anything but cold tea (without milk or sugar) before luncheon. Cold tea is more cleansing to the palate, and more refreshing than

any other liquid under the circumstances. Brandy and water and other alcoholic sipping is fatal to after comfort, as is also beer, however pleasant the immediate sensation of a draught of the latter may be. One and all they are heating, and instead of quenching the thirst only provoke it (*crescit amor, &c.*). Work on quietly but perseveringly till luncheon, and let the spot for this important crisis of the day be well chosen. Let it be a regular business, not a hasty snatch of bread and cheese under a hedge, but a well considered and well carried out affair. It is an utter mistake to imagine that cold viands are most appropriate for heated and jaded frames. Hot soups, stews, hashes, or pies and hot potatoes—they will keep hot for hours wrapped in flannel—are most palatable and refreshing in hot weather, on the same principle that hot curry is eaten in India and hot soup at balls. Sandwiches and cold meat fall very flat and insipid on the palate when you are hot and exhausted. They are stale and unprofitable. This may not be the generally accepted view, but I maintain it is the true one. On homœopathic principles you will find the hot lunch most refreshing and recuperative *(similia similibus curantur.)* As to your drink, that is an entirely different matter. Let that be as cold as possible. A small iceberg enwrapped in flannel

is a most enjoyable adjunct to the partridge shooting lunch. Drink champagne, claret, hock, or any other light wines, with or without soda water, but, as a rule, eschew beer, sherry, and spirits, and by the way, if your shooting lies over a dry land where no water is, do not forget to have some brought for the poor dogs, who will enjoy it as much as you will the best iced drink at your command. Do not be in a hurry with your lunch, nor afterwards. Take a cigar, lie on your back, stretch your legs, with your heels up if possible, after the sensible American fashion. Even a siesta—a short one, of course—in my opinion is not only allowable but advisable in some cases. A full hour or an hour and a half devoted to luncheon is not time lost, to say nothing of the agreeable way of spending it. There is plenty of time left before sundown to make a good bag, and after your midday rest you will resume your sport like "giants refreshed." Anyone is perfectly welcome to call this Sybaritic advice, but it is nevertheless good and reasonable both in theory and practice. If the ladies join the luncheon party so much the better, for their presence will prolong this pleasant interlude in the day's sport. When you resume your shooting, still remember the morning vows and my advice. You require no more stimulants in the way of alcohol till

the day's work is over. Stick to the tea, and your good resolutions about keeping your temper, behaving fairly to your companions, and walking slowly. Do not make too long a day, especially at the beginning of the season, when, perhaps, you are a little out of training. Overwork on the first day often upsets a man for many succeeding days. The steel is taken out of him.

And now let us suppose the day's work is over. The ladies are on the lawn ready to congratulate you on the result of the sport. A pleasant half hour you may now spend; you may take a cigar; and a brandy and soda is permissible; and in pleasant chat amid shrubs and flowers, quietly cool down before your tepid bath, and general preparation for the pleasant addendum to a pleasant day—a sociable dinner. And even to the table I must follow you with advice. Be very moderate, both at and after dinner, if you wish to be really fit for another day's work on the morrow, and to be able to do it in comfort; and remember that prolonged sittings, with cigars and their concomitants, do not tend to clear the vision or steady the sportsman's hand or improve his walking powers. I hope no one will be angry with me for giving this advice. It is as good as it is hard to follow in many particulars.

Re "driving" and "kiting." I have already remarked that the excellent shooting modern sportsmen make with modern firearms renders the early part of the September campaign very hot for the birds, particularly if there is a good supply of cover, in which, while seeking safety, the poor little creatures meet with death. But the days of really good cover are almost over, and we all know that the old-fashioned knee-high stubbles with plenty of rough grass and weeds in them are all but things of the past. High and clean farming, the sowing of the root crop in rows instead of broadcast, the close trimming of hedges, and the gradual abolition of rough waste ground which used to afford capital cover for game, have made partridges much harder to approach, and the birds each year seem to receive a fresh accession to their natural wildness and wariness. Thus it comes to pass that, after the coveys have been fired at freely during the first week or so of September, it is almost impossible to get a fair shot at the survivors, however many they be, by what are still held by not a few old-fashioned sportsmen to be the only "legitimate" means. And even when the cover is pretty good in ordinary and average seasons, the best of the partridge shooting is over by the middle of the month (except where reserved for October), and what

birds are left are practically unapproachable in the ordinary way. Hence of late years, much more than was the case formerly, recourse has been had to "driving," and shooting under "the kite," or artificial hawk; both of which methods of making a bag have had many very bitter things said against them, especially the latter. I shall venture, however, to say a few words in support of both practices, despite the animadversions I may incur from sportsmen who have no mercy on those who advocate any but the olden style and "legitimate" methods of bagging our September game birds. The remarks I made a few pages back in reference to the "legitimacy" and reasonableness of "driving" grouse, are for the most part applicable to "driving" partridges. Modern birds are often wild enough in all conscience on the very opening of the season, or at least by the end of the first week, dashing off when flushed more like hawks than civilised partridges. In olden days a covey when disturbed during the first fortnight would seldom fly farther than the next field or so, but now it is no uncommon thing for them to wing away a mile or more, and disappear in the far distance. In former times, too, when you had marked your birds down, the difficulty was often to get them to rise again; but now the difficulty is

to get a second shot at them, even in good cover. As the season progresses matters get worse, and soon it becomes a well-nigh hopeless pursuit to attempt "legitimate" shooting at the heels of your dogs, or by walking the covers ever so warily and persistently. Every day the birds become wilder; and if you want a few for your own table, or as presents for your friends, you must ask and answer for yourself the simple question, "How are they to be got?" You are inclined to think the well-known advice given by the father of old to his son in reference to making money is applicable to your difficulty. *Si possis recté,* he said, *si non quocunque modo,* which you translate, "Get your birds in a sportsmanlike way if you can, but if you can't, get them in any way." Not that you contemplate any operation or method of circumventing the desired birds which would come under the designation of poaching; but you do not shrink from entertaining ideas of methods which some, perhaps many, of your sporting friends would class under the category of "questionable." Of course driving suggests itself, and you have no great difficulty in determining on this plan. Nor, indeed, need you have any qualms in this respect. A man must be a good shot to kill many birds in a day's partridge driving.

But perhaps the means are not at hand for a partridge drive, as the sport requires half a dozen or more guns and as many beaters, as well as men with flags posted here and there to modify, if possible, the course of the birds in their flight, which cannot be anticipated with the same degree of probability as that of grouse; and, perhaps, too, the character of the country is not adapted for driving at all. What, then, is to be done to bring birds to hand? The "kite" is a killing method, but is it legitimate? If hard things have been said against driving, still harder have been said against the kite. The objection to the use of the artificial hawk, on the ground that it damages the shooting prospects of the district where it is called into requisition, is one which, if sustained by facts, cannot be ignored. It is alleged that it scares the partridges clean away, the remembrance of the terrible bird of prey they saw hovering above them in the air making those that escape the guns resolve never to return to the fields which have such unpleasant associations. This is true to some extent, for the continual use of the kite undoubtedly produces this effect; but it is equally true that its use for a few days in the season, with an interval between them, does not cause birds to forsake the ground on which they have been bred. The sportsman, then, need not trouble

himself on this score if he only uses the kite *in moderation.* But it is further urged against this expedient that it is utterly unsportsmanlike, that the whole proceeding is a cowardly one, as a mean advantage is taken of the poor birds, and further, that any tyro can kill them when, as our Irish friends might say, they have been frightened to death.

Of course it is easy enough to say that anything is unsportsmanlike; and in this, as in many other kindred matters, there is extreme difficulty in enunciating principles by which it can be determined what is and what is not legitimate sport. If care, skill, and good generalship are elements in sport, then certainly carrying out a day's shooting under the kite requires these elements.

Granted that the kite is a killing expedient, it must be remembered that it only is so when managed with knowledge and judgment. The statement that anyone can shoot partridges under the kite, and that it is an easy thing to make a good bag when this device is had recourse to, is really contrary to facts. A gun is a killing instrument, and may be said to take birds "at a mean advantage," but it is a *sine quâ non* that you hold it properly. It is really a very difficult thing to carry out a day under the kite successfully, and it is by no means as easy as

some allege to hit scared partridges. Give a party of average sportsmen, unused to the proper method of managing a kite, a good wind to fly it in, a well-stocked manor for their operations, and attendants to do their bidding, and yet nine times out of ten they will make a miserable failure, scaring a score of birds off the shooting to every one they get to lie.

To get sport under the kite, you must know how to work the whole business from beginning to end; you must make your dispositions thoughtfully and carefully, and carry them into effect deliberately and thoroughly, only modifying them when absolutely necessary. First of all, the birds must be got into some cover; and to effect this there must be much judgmatic walking or riding the open ground and posting of attendants at certain points to direct the flight of the birds. A fair supply being thus worked in, the next matter is to get the kite over them. One of the attendants is told off as the kite-flyer; but, if you want the thing done well, do it yourself—*i.e.*, presuming you are well posted in this business. The shooting party should keep from a quarter to half a mile to windward of the cover to be first subjected to the experiment, and at this distance the kite should be raised. No talking while the flyer with the

kite well up slowly and quietly walks down wind towards the cover, having let out the string some hundred and fifty to two hundred yards. If an attempt is made to get up the kite near the cover, the chances are ten to one that the birds will be off directly, for their first impulse when they see a hawk is to scud away as quickly as possible, but they are afraid to attempt flight if it is well up in the air over them. Your flyer cautiously approaches the cover, having done his best to take a line which shall have avoided as far as possible intervening hedges, and brought him to the easiest gaps. When he is within fifty yards or so of the edge of the cover he will stop, let out as much string as the kite will carry, and get it as near the centre of the cover as he can, and, if there be a steady wind, peg the string into the ground and return towards the guns. The kite should be kept flying over the cover for at least a quarter of an hour. A well made kite, not of home manufacture, unless you have some one at home clever at such work, but bought at a gunsmith's, or a Japanese bird kite, is an excellent imitation of a hawk, or, at least, presents a most hawk-like appearance when well up, the wads of paper on the tail being suggestive of small birds dogging a hawk, as is their habit. It certainly has a wonderful effect on the partridges below,

for during the *mauvais quart d'heure* the majority will, according to their instinct, and in abject fear, gradually creep under the leaves of the turnips or mangolds to the adjoining hedges; while the rest, still more prostrated with terror, will remain fixed on the spot whence first they saw the hawk, and lie as dead as stones. The guns now approach the cover, and walk it slowly, assisted by a beater between each, and a steady dog or two, the flyer meanwhile manœuvring as best as he can to keep the kite over the heads of the party, or a little in advance of them. After you have worked the cover, you carefully try the hedgerows, out of which you will get the most sport. One gun at least should be on each side, and every yard of the hedges should be beaten in the most careful manner, as it is with the greatest difficulty the birds are made to leave them. One great advantage of "kiting" is that two guns can carry out the day's operations.

This, then, is the *modus operandi;* and now for a moment to revert to an observation often made, that any tyro can kill birds under the kite. They are by no means so easy to hit as might be supposed. So utterly horrified and bewildered are they by the appalling spectacle of the huge bird of prey hovering over them, that their flight

is most eccentric when they are induced to rise. One will get up and zigzag like a snipe; another will rise and drop again like a stone in a few seconds, and repeat the operation several times; whilst a third will half run and half fly along the ground, just as a hen partridge will do in the breeding season, when, pretending to be disabled, she endeavours to draw away the intruder from her nest. Some, again, will get up at your very feet; some in front, some behind you, you know not where; while some will make straight towards you, threatening to come into collision with your head or gun barrels. In fact, they get up and fly in every way least expected, and it requires a sportsman of good nerve and steady hand, and a good shot generally, to kill his birds under the kite. It is not by any means an uncommon thing to see a man who is a first rate partridge shot under ordinary circumstances, miss bird after bird under this new phase of shooting. A field of from ten to twenty acres or more, surrounded by hedges and ditches, is the most convenient size for "kiting" purposes; but it may happen that you have to deal with smaller inclosures, or perhaps your sport lies in an entirely uninclosed country. To meet the emergencies of each case, and to work your kite to the best advantage in each, is the part of a good general;

and there should be only one general to direct the proceedings of the day. In the multitude of sporting counsellors there is neither safety nor success.

The above remarks need not be taken as an absolute defence of the kite, for it may be admitted that from several points of view the expedient is open to be called in question. Still, there is not a little which may be urged in its defence; and probably there are many who, pluming themselves on their rigid maintenance of "legitimate" sport, if they joined in a well managed day's kiting, would at least acknowledge that several sporting virtues are called into exercise by the operations, and that a good deal of excitement and interest is evoked during their continuance. At all events, they could not fail to see that the use of the kite is an instance of man's wit and skill baffling the resources of animals *feræ naturæ*, which is a main element in all true sport.

A word or two about partridge shooting in France. To an Englishman perhaps the most notable thing about the French season is the date of its commencement. Accustomed as he is to "the first," as a term synonymous with the opening of the campaign, he has a difficulty in looking upon the latter as a movable feast to be altered year after year, according to the caprice of Nature, or of

the civil government of the country. This, however, it is on the continent; and if the arrangement were to be discussed upon the mere ground of convenience and common sense, there is a great deal to be said in its favour. But, however this may be, it is certain that no one can, in any year, venture to predict very long before what will be the day or even the week of the *ouverture*. It is not until the harvest has begun, or, at least, till the wheat is assuming its golden tint, that the departmental authorities meet in solemn conclave, and the day of doom for the partridges is fixed by immutable decree. Then the prefect draws up his ordinance, the fatal bill is printed and sent out, and is to be seen duly placarded in a conspicuous spot upon the walls and fences of each commune. Not only does the date of the season vary from year to year, but also from department to department. The earliest sportsmen are afield sometimes as early as the twelfth of August, and the latest do not appear in a wet season till as late as if they were in England. In the sunny south the opening day is always at least a week in advance of the northern provinces; and there is often even as much as three weeks' difference between the *ouverture* in the Pyrenees districts, or the Bouches du Rhône, and in the Pas de Calais or the Ardennes. All

this is very convenient in one point of view; for the fashionable sportsman, who has friends in all parts of the country, can so time his visits to them as to be there at the start in each case, and assist at several successive *ouvertures* in the same year. The morning of the opening day is a grand occasion in every village all over France. The bells do not ring, it is true, and there is no military band, but the place wears quite a different aspect to that of the day before. Every landed proprietor, no matter how tiny his holding, has assumed in the meantime a new character. Yesterday he was only simple *rentier,* to day he is *chasseur.* And be sure that he lets all the world know what a metamorphosis has taken place. He will be seen very early in the morning strutting about round what he calls his *château,* picturesquely attired in a dress which combines a little of the Italian brigand with a good deal of the English beater. If he possesses a dog of any kind, he will be heard whistling, and calling, and speechifying to it, and may be found feeding it with a dainty morsel or two, with a view of putting it in a good humour for the day. The French dog, be he terrier, turnspit, poodle, or anything else, is usually a thing for ornament alone, and not for use, deserving well of the company if he will only keep quiet and lag behind, instead

of rushing forward to disturb the game. A pointer is a rare creature indeed in a French kennel, and, when he is owned by an enterprising and ambitious sportsman, is brought out, in nine cases out of ten, with a portly corporation, which would do no dishonour to an alderman, but would make the very hair of an English gamekeeper's head stand on end with horror and dismay. At nine o'clock, or even much earlier, the party of *chasseurs* is *en route*. Their passage through the town is watched by an admiring multitude, and each article of dress commented on with gusto, by the bucolic or *bourgeois connoisseurs*. Nor is this introductory march always the least important part of the ceremony. French sporting since the revolution is almost a thing of the past, except for the upper ten. The system of endless partition between children has hopelessly cut up the good sized estates, and unless some millionaire has bought out the small owners and collected their petty plots within one ring fence, it is impossible to follow a covey, or even walk straight forward for half a mile, without coming upon some rival's territory. The sport is therefore often restricted to walking backwards and forwards over a very limited space—a space which in England it would not take one gun half a day to beat. The rival proprietors

watch one another with jealous eye, and occasionally wait idle with reciprocal impatience while a covey driven across the border is being shot at and sent back again. Occasionally the rivals make common cause together and start in a joint party. Then there is something like rivalry, there is betting, shouting, and quarrelling without end. However, everything ends happily, of course, and, at the conclusion of the hard day's work, he who has made the largest bag marches back triumphant through the streets, waving his *spolia opima* in the great net bag he carries, and wearing the crown of victory on his head. Surely some such arrangement in reference to the opening of the shooting season as exists in France, and also in Belgium, and, I believe, in some parts of Germany, might advantageously be made in this country. The Home Minister might be safely entrusted with naming the opening day after taking due advice, or it might be left to the Queen in Council. The day, of course, would depend on the forwardness or backwardness of both the harvest and the birds.

Before closing this chapter, which has already run to a greater length than I anticipated, I should like to add a few more words of advice to young sportsmen. My desire to be brief must be my apology for appearing to

write dogmatically. If you have not a *good* pointer or setter, don't use one at all. Bad dogs do more harm than service in running up birds and causing you, further, to rate them and put up more; to say nothing of involving a loss of temper, which does not improve your shooting. A retriever led by an attendant is very useful if it thoroughly knows its business and is well under command. To my mind, the chief pleasure of partridge shooting is to see the working of a good pointer or setter, and I would always sooner find a wounded bird by their persevering intelligence than bag a brace of fresh ones. A dog which will "seek dead" steadily, draw cautiously on a runner, and "road" a bird till you get it, is invaluable. Don't give up trying for a wounded bird till the search is utterly hopeless. Perseverance is a mark of the true sportsman, and it is a great cruelty to leave a poor creature to die a lingering death.

Even a very young sportsman knows what a "towering" bird is; but why some wounded birds tower seems to be still an open question among those who discuss such matters, some holding that the bird is shot in the brain, some in the liver, and some in the heart. Anyhow, some nerve of acute sense is destroyed, and the bird in its flight loses self control. I have never heard

any good reason given for the fact that in five cases out of six a "towerer" will be found lying on its back with its feathers comparatively unruffled. It is certainly strange that this should be so, as a towerer falls dead from a very considerable height. Be very careful in marking where it falls, as there is little scent attached to it, and remember that, as an almost invariable rule, it does not fall as far off as it appears to do.

When you can, have a *good* marker or two in attendance. Many persons are bad markers, for the moment birds seem to be near the ground they take their eyes off them, concluding that they have settled, whereas they often skim along within a foot or two of the ground for a long distance, and not unfrequently top the next hedge. Don't talk when on the beat; there is nothing a partridge —like many other wild creatures—fears so much as the human voice. Walk also as quietly as circumstances will permit. Beat your boundaries first, if possible, so as to drive your birds inwards; but this you cannot always do, as it is of still greater importance to begin work to leeward of your shooting, so as to have the wind generally blowing towards you. In each field, as far as circumstances will permit, give your dogs the wind. The question of scent is a very interesting one, but too long to

enter into. I prefer dogs that carry their heads high, as the scent is in the air and not on the ground. It is said that a hot sun "burns up all the scent," but I have often noticed good pointers own it better on hot dry days, and with the ground parched, providing there is a little air moving, than on wet ones, when the ground is saturated. You sometimes wonder "where on earth the birds have got to." Well, often—nowhere. You have passed them by owing to not beating closely enough. They often seem to know that safety is in keeping quiet. Do not despise fallows or shrink from what strikes you as rather a dreary proceeding in trying them. On rough fallows, when the season is advanced, you may often get most excellent sport if you walk steadily *across* them. Remember, too, that in hot dry weather the birds, for some hours in the middle of the day, frequent meadows, especially in the neighbourhood of water. Don't go into standing corn of any kind, or let your dogs go in, as they do almost as much damage as you would by shaking out the grain from ripe ears. Even when the farmer says you may try a bit of standing barley or anything else, it is the best policy not to do so, as in his heart the permission is often given grudgingly, and inwardly he is angry with you. Don't make unnecessary gaps in

hedges, or leave gates open, or disturb cattle. Be liberal, also, with the game to farmers over whose land you shoot, and don't hesitate to give a few shillings to his men in the way of largess or otherwise, and always reward with a sixpence any of the labourers who mark a bird for you. Carry a few small coins in your pocket for this purpose. You will be gainer in the end by it, and you will have the pleasant consciousness that "John Hodge" and his fellows are glad to see you in the field.

As to the art of shooting, this requires a treatise in itself, and if you wish to read a pleasant and at the same time a scientific book about it, get Mr. J. D. Dougall's "Shooting, its Appliances, Practice, and Purpose," published by Messrs. Sampson Low, Marston, and Co., 188, Fleet-street. All I shall say here is, fire as soon as you can at partridges. They rise perpendicularly as a rule, and while rising look larger, expose their most vulnerable parts, as their feathers are "all abroad," and the shot has not to lose part of its force by following an object which is going off rapidly. At the same time, if the birds rise very close, the young sportsman must give them some law. A horrible sight is a bird cut to pieces. Don't shoot at birds at unreasonable distances on the outside chance of stopping one, as a stray corn or two

may be carried away by a bird without your noticing that it has been hit, and it goes off to die to the profit of nobody. I know how hard it is for a young sportsman to follow this advice in the excitement of the moment, as

> Spite of the rules of art, he must let fly,
> In one of two extremes—too far or else too nigh.

Try, my young friend, to be "cool, calm, and collected," and let me add, do not fire "into the brown," as it is called, of a covey. Such indiscriminate shooting, for obvious reasons, is unsportsman-like, and though occasionally three or four birds may fall and give a momentary satisfaction, it more frequently happens that you do not drop one at all, but perhaps send several off with shot in them. Pick out for aim a leading or outside bird, one of the old ones, if possible; and be content with one bird at a time. Perchance you will be rewarded by another that is crossing the one you aim at the moment when you pull your trigger.

To sing the praises of the partridge gastronomically is almost a work of supererogation, so well is this dainty game bird known and appreciated by all who can claim to have sound taste. The monks of old in France wished it, with other "avine" delicacies, to be made sacred to the clergy, and one of their preachers, in the year 1216,

represented pheasants, *partridges,* and ortolans, as addressing themselves to that class, and entreating to be eaten by them and them only, that, "incorporated with their glorious bodies, they might be raised to heaven, and not go with impious devourers to the infernal regions." Our own dramatists bear witness to the repute in which our forefathers held the partridge.

> Fetch me a pheasant, or a brace of *partridges,*
> From goodwife poulterer, for my lady's supper,

says Ben Jonson, in his "Staple of News;" and Prigg, in Beaumont and Fletcher's "Beggars' Bush," makes this modest demand:

> I must have my capons
> And turkeys brought me in with my green geese,
> And ducklings in the season; fine fat chickens;
> And if you chance where an eye of tame pheasants
> And *partridges* are kept, see they be mine.

And William Browne, the pastoral poet, in a curious passage intended probably to show his high estimation of the bird, speaks of

> Pheasant and *partridge* into jelly turned,
> Grated with gold, seven times refined and burned,
> And dust of orient pearl.

We all know the old distich, which says,

> If the *partridge* had but the woodcock's thigh,
> 'Twould be the best bird that ever did fly.

Sir T. Elyot, in the "Castel of Helth," says, "Partryshe, of all fowles is most soonest digested, and hath in hym moche nutriment." I shall certainly not enlarge on the merits of the partridge, as there is no need so to do. I will only say that I think it a great mistake to hang birds till they are "high," or rather "rotten." The *true* gamey flavour of a young bird is at its best as soon as it is killed. Perhaps the "new sensation" has something to do with it, but I fancy a young bird never tastes better than on the evening of the 1st of September. Consign old ones to pies, to be eaten, of course, cold, or to *salmis*.

A writer in *Land and Water* has said, "birds are best and fattest in September, and should never be shot in November, if possible, as the poisoned seed wheat is dangerous, and they live on wireworms and other animalculæ." I venture modestly to question this statement. Young birds, I think, are fattest in October; and I never heard of anyone suffering from eating a November partridge.

French partridges are very inferior to the English birds, their flesh being dry and comparatively tasteless.

To distinguish young birds from old. In young birds, *i.e.*, till end of October, the bill is brown, and legs brown or rather of dusky yellow; in old birds both are of a bluish

white. The reason of this is that the bills and legs of young birds have had much less wear than those of the old ones. If you hold a young bird between your finger and thumb by the lower mandible of its beak, the weight of the body will cause the mandible to bend, which it will not in the case of an old bird. But the best test will be found in the long feathers of the wings. These, in the case of old birds, are rounded at the end, the use of the wings in flying, and particularly in the favourite habit partridges have of "dusting" themselves, having brought about this result; whereas in young birds the feathers are pointed, for the simple reason that they have not enjoyed a very long existence wherein to blunt or round them by usage.

By way of a final memorandum, let me urge the propriety of doing one's best to preserve the comely appearance of one's birds after they are shot. The practice of twisting a bird's head under its wing and consigning it when warm, and perhaps bleeding, to a shooting-coat pocket, is a bad and unreasonable one. What more horrible sight than to see the confused and shapeless lumps of mingled blood and feathers turned out at the end of the day from inside pockets? Let an attendant carry a bag with an outside net, and loops

with buttons whereon to hang the birds in it after they have been smoothed over by the hand. Such bags are to be got at all gunsmiths; but more serviceable still are partridge "sticks," as on these the birds hang, get cool and stiff, and preserve their plumage better than even in the nets. No slight part of the pleasure of a day's partridge shooting is "laying out" the results on the return home; and we all like to make presents of braces of birds, and to receive them too. This pleasure is seriously detracted from if the birds are in such a condition as to be objects rather of aversion than of delight to the eye. It may be noted, also, that a mangled bird, carried in a hot pocket, or even in a close game bag, will often go wrong in a few hours, and exchange its gamey for a putrid flavour.

PHEASANTS.

PHEASANT SHOOTING.—*A Warm Corner.*

PHEASANTS.

EVEN more closely associated than the Grouse with August and the Partridge with September is the Pheasant with October, though as a matter of fact there are fewer pheasants shot in October than in any of the three following months. It is almost impossible to use or hear or see the word October without visions of pheasants rising before one. In our earliest years, long perhaps before we had ever seen a live pheasant, and were only familiar with it in the picture books of the nursery, we knew the old rhyme which told us that

"Mild October brings the pheasant."

Yes, mild and soft and soothing is the autumn time, the pleasantest of the whole year. Aristotle says that the old prefer the spring to the autumn, because the former revives hope in their breasts, and is suggestive of a resur-

rection from the dead, whereas they are reminded by the latter of decay and death, and are not able to suppress the sad thoughts which are called up by the outward aspect of nature; but, with all due deference to such an authority, I am inclined to think that the old enjoy the autumn as much as the young or middle-aged. Even its fogs and mists are pleasant. Well does Keats call it the "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness," as if its mists and vapours were a part of its beauty, as indeed they are, as they roll upward or disappear before the sun. At no time of the year are country rambles more delightful, whether we are searching for nuts, for mushrooms, or humble blackberries, or, gun in hand, beating up the haunts of the pheasant. It is now that the woods and hedgerow trees look their best, even on dull days, for, as Southey has well said:

O'er the leaves before they fall
Such hues has Nature thrown,
That the woods wear on sunless days
A sunlight of their own.

And as a poet of the people has sung:

Gorgeous are thy woods, October,
Clad in glowing mantle sere!
Brightest tints of beauty blending,
Like the west when day's descending,
Thou'rt the sunset of the year.

We need no lectures on chromatology, or learned classification of leaf tints into Chloro, Xantho, Erythro, Chryso, and Phaio-Phylls, to be able to appreciate the autumnal beauty of the woodlands.

But I must remember that my business is with the pheasants first, and the autumn afterwards, or rather with the birds and not the season. Before, however, coming to closer quarters as it were with them, let me make some jottings about their history from both an antiquarian and an ornithological point of view.

The Phasianidæ belong to the Order of birds called by most naturalists the Gallinæ, but sometimes termed Rasores, or "scrapers," from their habit of scratching the ground for their food. To the Family of the *Phasianidæ* belong the peacocks, the turkeys, the guinea fowls, and the various breeds of what we call domestic fowls; and the pheasant may be considered the type of the family. Our bird, named by naturalists *Phasianus Colchicus*, is, as its title implies, of foreign origin, and the old legend is that it was first brought from the banks of the river Phasis, in Colchis, to Europe by Jason of the Golden Fleece and his Argonauts; and thus we are at once relieved of any etymological difficulty as to the origin and meaning of the word "pheasant." But

without wishing to detract uncharitably from the enterprise of the captain of the good ship Argo, it does not seem that the pheasant became *thoroughly* naturalised in Europe till about the middle of the thirteenth century. It was found, however, in this country earlier than this, though the actual date of its introduction may not be ascertainable. According to Mr. W. B. Dawkins, in a learned communication made some few years ago, the most ancient record of the existence of the pheasant in Great Britain is to be found in some manuscripts in the British Museum. In these manuscripts, of the twelfth century, edited and published in 1861 by Professor Stubbs, is the bill of fare drawn up by King Harold "for the canons' households of from six to seven persons, A.D. 1059," and of this bill of fare a pheasant (*aut unus Phasianus*) forms an item. The professor deems it very probable that as pheasants had become naturalised before the Norman invasion, and that as the English and Danes were not the introducers of strange animals, the longtails were introduced by the Romans, "who naturalised the fallow deer in Britain." It is well known that pheasants were amongst the game found in England in the reign of Henry I. (1100—1135), and that a licence was necessary to kill them, as it is recorded that the Abbot of Amesbury

obtained a licence during that reign for that purpose. It appears in Echard's History of England (A.D. 1299), in the reign of Edward I., that they were marketable commodities then, and fetched 4d. each. Then, too, as now, they appear to have been a luxury, as a fat lamb realised no more, except from "Christmas to Shrovetide." But perhaps we can go even further back than the date first mentioned. Camden, in his "Britannia," gives us a copy of the Charter of Conveyance of the Keeping of the Dengie Hundred, in Essex, from Edward the Confessor, who came to the throne in 1041 or 1042, to Ralph Peverell. He says he extracted it from the King's Record, in the Exchequer; and in it, among the game enumerated, we find "fesant hen and fesant cocke." But, whatever be the date of its introduction among us, certain it is that it was brought from Georgia, the country lying between the Black and Caspian Seas; so that we cannot claim it as one of our original fauna.

The ring-necked pheasant (*Phasianus torquatus*), *i.e.*, the variety pretty well known among us as distinguished by the ring of white feathers round its neck, was brought from China to Europe very many years ago. These pheasants are frequent in India and in the regions about the Caspian Sea. The species in China, which is smaller

than the common pheasant, is considered by M. Temminck as a perfectly distinct one, and in this view he is supported by the fact that in that country it never mixes with the common pheasant. The "pied" pheasants, which are frequently shot in our coverts, are not a distinct variety, their peculiar feathering being probably attributable to some disease of the skin, a remark which applies also to white ones. I notice that in a paper read before the Linnæan Society, in February, 1880, that it is stated that the ring-necked birds seemed to thrive better in New Zealand than the common ones.

The habits of pheasants are well known to sportsmen and naturalists. They are polygamous, and the hens in their wild state lay from ten to fourteen eggs, which are hatched out towards the end of May or the beginning of June, the young pheasants thus coming into the world nearly a month before the young partridges. But the breeding of pheasants in their wild state cannot be depended on for supplying a sufficient stock for the preserves, so numerous are the causes which prevent the nides coming to perfection. Hence the system almost universally adopted of obtaining the eggs from birds kept in pheasantries, and setting them under

domestic fowls, and rearing them by hand, as it is called, afterwards.

The poets seem to have gone into raptures over the glorious plumage of the cock pheasant; and no wonder, for it is as beautiful as can well be imagined. Mary Howitt thus sings of the bird and his sylvan home among the birches:

> Away, to the woods, with the silvery rind
> And the emerald tresses afloat in the wind;
> For 'tis joy to go to those sylvan bowers
> When summer is rich with leaves and flowers,
> And to see 'mid the growth of all lovely things
> The joyous pheasant unfold his wings,
> And then cower down, as if to screen
> His gorgeous purple, gold, and green.
> Oh beautiful bird, in thy stately pride,
> Thou wast made in a waste of flowers to hide.
> And to fling to the sun the glorious hues
> Of thy rainbow gold, thy greens and blues!
> Yes, beautiful pheasant, the birchwood bowers,
> Rich many-formed leaves, bright tinted flowers,
> Broad masses of shade, and sunshine free,
> In thy gorgeous beauty are meet for thee.

Truly a glorious bird is the *Phasianus Colchicus,* the common pheasant of the English preserves! And what so exciting to the sportsman as the whir-r-r-r of its quickly-expanded wings, as it rises heavily from the covert, and vainly seeks in flight that safety which the fern brake and leafy copse will no longer afford? There

has the wild bred bird dwelt since first it chipped the shell, and came forth from the clear brown egg, a little downy creature, scarcely bigger than a sparrow, to follow its heedful mother hither and thither, and to be fed with such "delicacies of the season" as ants' eggs, small caterpillars, grubs, and maggots, which she scratched out of the earth, or from amid the dead leaves, or picked out from the crevices of the old park palings or the decayed trunks of trees. The nest of the parent bird had been commenced when the bleak March winds were whistling through the nearly naked boughs, and January snows yet lay in white patches between the spreading roots of the gnarled oaks and towering elms, and in many a nook and hollow of the wide woodland. When the primrose buds were just beginning to show themselves, and a faint odour, like a promise and foretaste of delicious things to come, was wafted from the mossy violet beds; when all nature was listening for the first cry of the cuckoo, to tell that spring was really come; when now and then a solitary songster sent forth an interrupted strain, in preparation for the vernal chorus—then it was that the short, husky crow of the cock pheasant was heard in the woods, telling of love and rivalry; then the little brown hen fluttered and plumed her sober-coloured wings, and began

to bestir herself and prepare for the maternal duties which she knew must ere long devolve upon her, and her alone; for her liege lord, to whose presence she was now invited, will take no share in them. Let us not despise the little brown hen. "Let us not," as Jesse has it, "when we see the male expanding his rich and varied plumage in the sunbeams, forget that on the female devolve all the offices of love and affection. She hatches, feeds, and protects at the risk of her life her helpless young ones; and what we may consider as lowering her in the scale of creation is, on the contrary, an act of the greatest kindness and consideration. Her want of beauty is her chief protection, and her humility saves her from a thousand perils." Thomas Miller, in his "Beauties of the Country," gives the following picture of pheasant life: "What a lordly creature the pheasant looks, moving along the grassy glade of a wood, now erecting his head as if to listen, while perchance a sunbeam falls upon his burnished neck, then stooping to pick up a fallen acorn, the long plumes of his tail swaying in the wind like silken pennons, or, alarmed by the rustling of the long reeds, plunging among the underwood, or flapping his way to the ivied arm of a tree! How beautiful appear a quantity of these birds, feeding upon the wild wood

fruits in some sequestered path, which is seldom trodden by any foot save their own! What terrible havoc the murderous gun makes of their splendid feathers, scattering their gold and crimson and purple plumes upon the wind, and drawing down the bright scarlet rim that encircles the deep shining eyes which the filmy darkness covers! The sound of their voices, too, calling to each other from the distant thicket, harmonises well with the silence of the scene. Then to come upon them unawares, when they are squatting among the tangled grass and plants, and see them spring up, and with a loud noise whirr through the woven branches to some more secret covert, is a beautiful and striking sight, especially in the month of October, when every motion of their strong wings scatters a shower of golden leaves to the ground." And really, when one slays a cock pheasant it is almost impossible to avoid feeling that one has done a hardly justifiable deed. Pope's lines involuntarily suggest themselves:

> See from the brake the whirring pheasant springs,
> And mounts exulting on triumphant wings!
> Short is his joy; he feels the fiery wound,
> Flutters in blood, and panting beats the ground.
> Ah! what avails his glossy, varying dyes,
> His purple crest, and scarlet circled eyes?
> The vivid green his shining plumes unfold,
> His painted wings, and breast that flames with gold!

Hand-reared pheasants, unlike hand-reared partridges, do as well as the wild bred ones, and in due time come to as great perfection. There are few prettier sights than the open glade near the keeper's cottage, with the coops arranged in a semicircle, and the sheltering boughs on and near them, and the lively colony of young pheasants in and about them, so graceful and intelligent looking, so shy and yet so fairly domestic. Grateful, too, they seem to the hand that supplies them with their constant meals; and if they could speak they would doubly thank those who take sufficient trouble to make ants' eggs the *piéce de resistance* of their repasts.

This reminds me of an account I read of a curious industry in France, and the breeding of that insect which is usually considered interesting only as the subject of moralist fables—the industrious but not altogether friendly ant. A young lady, more practically philosophic than Æsop or La Fontaine, five or six years ago, actually started an establishment for the preservation and propagation of the ant species in France. The fair mistress of the institution was described as of rather "terrible" aspect. Although clad in a suit of buff, like the archeresses of olden times, she was not quite safely guarded against the attacks of her ungracious

protégés, who managed to bite her face and hands until they were tanned to the texture of parchment. The consequence of these continued attacks was to render her skin insensible to the most furious assailant. She lived day and night in the midst of her numerous wards, and employed large numbers of emissaries to collect fresh sacks of them from the great forests in or near France. It was not, however, a mere disinterested affection which suggested to her these strange proceedings. She kept only the ants which were "good layers," and sold their eggs at a high profit to the breeders of pheasants, whose taste for that article of food amounts almost to a madness. Until lately human ingenuity has been more usually exercised in inventing methods for the destruction of ants. But as we grow wiser we grow more humane. The police of Paris removed the ant house of the inventress to a respectful distance from the town; but she had already established her reputation and a custom which bid fair to make her fortune.

It is a curious thing that pheasants which, even when bred wild in the woods, are so easily taught to come regularly to be fed by the keeper, and of their own free will join the domestic poultry in the farmyard, can never be thoroughly tamed. They seem naturally, so to speak,

to be semi-domesticated, but they never become wholly so, do what you will. Their innate timidity seems incapable of being overcome, and the young birds which have been hatched under a hen will scamper off in terror if an unexpected intruder makes his appearance among them, although the remainder of the poultry are perfectly unconcerned. Though the pheasant will roost on trees near a house, and strut about a lawn within gunshot of our windows, it is not altogether a sociable bird. Its roosting habits are like those of most of the Gallinæ, the turkeys, peafowls, guinea fowls, and domestic poultry, when left to itself and not housed.

But, notwithstanding their shy nature, pheasants, more, perhaps, than any other birds, have a strong tendency to breed with other species. Instances are on record of their having paired with black grouse, guinea fowls, and even turkeys; and a cross with the domestic fowl is by no means uncommon. But the hybrid offspring is always unproductive. Gilbert White, in his "Natural History of Selborne," gives a long account of a hybrid pheasant. He says, "Lord Stawell sent me from the great lodge on the Holt a curious bird for my inspection. It was found by the spaniels of one of his keepers in a coppice, and shot in the wing. The shape, air, and

habit of the bird, and the scarlet ring round the eyes agreed well with the appearance of the cock pheasant; but then the head and neck, and breast and belly, were of a glossy black; and though it weighed 3lb. 3½oz., the weight of a large full-grown cock pheasant, yet there was no sign of any spurs on the legs, as is usual with all grown cock pheasants, who have long ones. The legs and feet were naked of feathers, and therefore it could be nothing of the grouse kind. In the tail were no long bending feathers, such as cock pheasants usually have, and are characteristic of the sex. The tail was much shorter than the tail of a hen pheasant, and blunt and square at the end. The back wing feathers and tail were all of a pale russet, curiously streaked, somewhat like the upper parts of a hen partridge. I returned it with my verdict that it was probably a spurious or hybrid hen bird, bred between a cock pheasant and some domestic fowl. When I came to talk with the keeper who brought it, he told me that some peahens had been known last summer to haunt the coppices and coverts where this mule was found." Some naturalists, however, who afterwards saw the bird set up in a case in the collection of the Earl of Egremont, at his seat at Petworth, were of opinion that it was a cross between a black-cock and a

common hen pheasant. But, after all, this hybrid pheasant may have only been an old hen pheasant which had just begun to assume the plumage of the cock.

The hen pheasant certainly seems to have this tendency to assume the plumage of the cock more strongly developed than any other female bird; and when she undergoes this transformation she is invariably incapable of laying eggs, and therefore ought to be destroyed, especially as she becomes very mischievous towards other birds, their eggs, and young. These "transformed" hens may be known, as Yarrell says, by their partial want of brilliancy of tint; the golden red feathers on the breast generally want the contrast of the broad dark velvet-like margin, while the legs and feet retain their smaller and more female character, and are without spurs. They are smaller, too, than the cock birds, and never utter the short husky crow of the latter. Other hen birds, members of the Gallinæ family, have this strange tendency to adopt the male attire in their old age—the domestic hen of the poultry yard, for instance, which also learns to crow like a cock, or, at least, makes a very good attempt at imitating the bold chanticleer who so often disturbs our morning slumbers. The peahen, also, is another instance. Among birds of other families which exhibit

this phenomenon may be mentioned, as properly authenticated instances, the partridge, the bustard, the American pelican, and the wild and tame duck.

It may not be generally known that the pheasant, like the partridge, is a friend to the farmers, it being a fact that it is a large consumer of wire worms. No less than half a pint of these destructive insects was once found in the crop of a hen bird.

The opening of the pheasant shooting season is not like that of the grouse and partridge season, and for many reasons the 1st of October is not so notable an anniversary in their calendar for those who handle the gun as the 12th of August or the 1st of September. The first day of grouse shooting is the first legal day of the season for the use of the gun, and therefore most ardently longed for, as to some, wearied out with the London season's pleasures and pursuits, shooting comes round again as an almost new sensation, and to others the sport on the moors is the long-desired and well-earned holiday of the year. To a still greater number of sportsmen the 1st of September is the day of all days to which they look forward with the most pleasurable excitement, and out of which they extract the greatest amount of actual enjoyment. The case is somewhat different with the opening

of the pheasant season. Nineteen out of twenty, or, perhaps, even a larger proportion, of sportsmen who go forth to do battle with the pheasants, have had the keen edge of their shooting appetites taken off by the pursuit of grouse or partridge, or of both; and thus to them pheasant shooting presents rather a variety of sport with the gun than the long-anticipated recurrence of a favourite amusement. Then, again, the opportunities for pheasant shooting early in the season every year are becoming more limited, as the facilities for pheasant breeding in what may be called the "open" country are annually becoming more and more circumscribed. The "wild" bred birds are diminishing every season, for the simple reason that districts suitable to them are diminishing. Nowadays, for pheasants to exist in anything like large numbers, whether bred naturally or reared "artificially," as it is called, an extended acreage of wood is absolutely necessary, and this must be guarded most jealously and at considerable expense. Such pheasant preserves are, therefore, only to be found here and there on the large estates of the aristocracy and landed gentry, and therefore, also, pheasant shooting cannot be got by sportsmen like grouse and partridge shooting, even though they may be able to pay for it

liberally enough. This state of things has gradually been brought about by the general advance of agriculture, the consequent destruction of thick hedgerows, small spinneys, and brakes, and the reclamation of rough waste land.

But under any circumstances in these times, whether in open "rough" districts suitable for the breeding of wild birds naturally or in large woods, pheasants would soon perish out of the land without careful protection—indeed, as quickly as would domestic poultry, if the law did not regard the latter as property, and the robber of henroosts as committing an act of theft. It is all very well to talk of preserving pheasants as an incentive to crime, and to speak tenderly of poachers as persons with a strong but pardonable love of sport, and as being incapable of understanding that they have no right to capture "wild" animals. They know perfectly well that by trespassing, if nothing more, they are committing an illegal act, and they know also that they have not a shadow of right to take anything from the land, whether it be a stick or stone, a turnip or sheep, or any living or dead thing. Poachers in these modern days show no lack of daring, and they are often so far successful in their raids that they prove too much for the gamekeepers and

assistants, beating them off or leaving them seriously wounded. This lamentable state of things has come about partly through the mawkish and sentimental rubbish which is talked and written about game preserving, and partly through the foolish timidity of game preservers. If such an humble individual as myself may venture to make a suggestion, it is to the effect that owners of preserves should take measures to back up their keepers more efficiently than is now often the case. If a regular gang of pheasant stealers is reported, there should be efficient patrols provided, and the keepers and their assistants should be instructed to teach the marauders a stern lesson of repression at all hazards. The responsibility lies to a great extent with the game preservers, who seem, in many cases, to have become overawed by the nonsense talked by the Anti-Game Law League fanatics. Many owners of covers will not now provide their keepers with guns or dangerous arms of any kind; and the poachers, well aware of this, enter preserves with comparatively slight fear of capture, and are, in fact, rendered bolder every year by the circulation of pamphlets and speeches in which their calling is described as a kind of honourable guerilla warfare against those who are interfering with their *rights;* while every

year game preservers seem to grow more timid of protecting *their* rights and using force to repel force. Much as it is to be regretted that the preservation of pheasants or of any other game is seized on as an opportunity by lawless men to attempt lawless deeds, I am strongly of opinion that, in order to discourage poaching in districts where game is preserved at all, the best plan is to preserve it very strictly, and to let idle vagabonds know that they will not be allowed to make nocturnal raids on private property with impunity.

Pheasant shooting may be divided into two kinds, namely, battue shooting, and that which may be called rough promiscuous or open shooting. The former is mainly reserved for the winter months, and this almost as much from necessity as choice. You can only have a battue in large covers, and there not till the leaves are well off, which is seldom the case till the end of November, or even later, especially after a summer such as we often have, during which there is comparatively little heat and much wet. But even if there were not this difficulty in the way, owners of large covers would not probably shoot them, as a general rule, till December and January, when country houses are more or less filled with guests. The male portion of these must have some out-

door amusement, or they would become an intolerable bore, especially when the frost stops the hunting, and the riding men are in a more pitiable condition than frozen-out gardeners "who have no work to do." It is then the battue answers a very beneficent purpose. Sporting writers, almost with one voice, decry the battue. "Stonehenge," for instance, is very hard on it, and considers that it is no more genuine pheasant shooting than "mobbing" a fox is foxhunting. This is how he describes the battue process: "First get together eight or ten crack shots, who may, many of them, be in wheeled chairs or on shooting ponies, but should be capable of killing, without spoiling, this beautiful bird; then, having breakfasted the party, proceed to post them at certain stations where the game must cross a piece of open ground commanded by the shooters' guns. Thus, in wide coverts, the guns are arranged along the edges of the open springs, at about forty or fifty yards apart, so as to command every head of game which passes, whether pheasant or hare, or sometimes rabbits, &c., each shooter having two or three guns and a man to load them; for even now, when breechloaders are indispensable, one gun would become too hot for use. As soon as these are posted, the beaters are sent to the other end of the

portion of wood which is to be driven, and they proceed to drive the game through it, often with the aid of a steady dog or two, but as often without any such assistance. For some time nothing is heard but the men calling to each other to keep the line, or their taps on the trees, &c., which may be distinguished at a long distance; presently a hare canters quietly out of the edge of the covert, and, putting up her head to observe what is going on, is knocked over—as easy a shot as a farmyard cock tied to a tree. Next, perhaps, a rabbit shares the same fate; she, however, seldom waits to look about her, but goes at a flying pace, and is a fair mark for a good shot. By and bye another and another shot is heard, with the squeal of a hare or two following them; then the beaters may be distinguished approaching, and their blows and cries are very loud and audible. The shooters are now collected to the spot to which all the beaters congregate, termed the *bouquet*. Here expectation is on tiptoe, every moment being the one at which the slaughter is supposed to be about to begin. Suddenly, a loud whir-r-r is heard, followed by the peculiar "cock-cock-cock-cockle" of the cock pheasant, of which some one, two, or three rise from the edge of the high wood, to be as certainly brought down; as fast as one falls

another shares his fate, and in five minutes or less the ground is covered with the slain. In many instances low nets are fixed along the edge of the wood, which compel the pheasants to get off their legs and rise, as they are so very tame, and so much inclined to run, as to escape in that way but for the nets. In this manner the whole of the pheasants in a portion of wood, or a great part of them—that is, all those which have neither doubled back nor escaped the guns—are brought to bag, and the keeper's retrievers are set to work to recover those which are not artistically disposed of. As soon as this part of the work is accomplished, another portion of wood is driven in a similar way; and this is repeated till the whole of the preserves are exhausted, or the sporting (!) propensities of the guests fully gratified."

This is all very well in its way, and the description, though exaggerated, is in one sense true; but, for the life of me, I cannot understand why battue shooting should be turned into ridicule and made a subject for sneers. No one for a moment would say that it is a high class sport, but I hold it is sport of a legitimate character enough. It requires no little generalship, for instance, to carry out a day's battue shooting successfully, and a man must be a good shot to kill many birds, even when they "rise in

clouds," at "the warm corner." The great objection to my mind connected with battues is the tendency the system has to create a foolish rivalry among game preservers to produce the largest record of game killed during the season. It must, however, be remembered that if there were no battue shooting there would be little or no pheasant breeding; and without breeding and artificial rearing there would be no little danger of *Phasianus colchicus* becoming extinct as far as this country is concerned—a contingency which few sportsmen, ornithologists, or gastronomists would like to contemplate.

Battue shooting has, in one sense, almost become a necessity. Still I do not wish to put myself forward as its apologist. Is it not possible to hit on some happy mean—some *via media*—between too much and too little preserving, or rather artificial rearing? Not long ago I read that on one of the most celebrated game estates in Norfolk, the practice of extensive pheasant rearing carried out up to that time was to be given up, and that the noble owner was going in for wild birds almost entirely, only taking up such nests as were obliged to be taken for safety.

On good land, and in good coverts for game, there is

no question that wild pheasants afford infinitely better sport than tame birds, and it is quite possible to have a sufficient quantity to satisfy the utmost desires of every good sportsman. Very few men really like a thing to be overdone, and, indeed, it becomes a business and little pleasure to fire away shot after shot, as quickly as two or three guns can be loaded. Of course no one can make sure of having even a decent show of pheasants without rearing some by hand, and a bad season is sometimes much more disastrous to wild pheasants than to partridges.

There is no need to condemn the rearing of pheasants altogether, but it might be done in a more moderate degree than that which has lately prevailed. The expense and the trouble incurred by some people have become quite absurd; and what is the result? As it has well been said, a man must not take a walk in his own plantations, especially if he takes a dog with him, for fear of disturbing the tame birds. He gets worried by his keeper, whose continual suspicions and fear of things going wrong lead him to believe that every man on the estate would poach if he were not watched, and every neighbour is trying to feed the birds away from him ; and when at last the day's shooting comes on,

if so many hundreds are not killed everything has gone wrong, and vexation and annoyance are the only results of a long-expected pleasure. As for the friends who come to shoot, not a few think more of the bag than the sport. Every one, of course, likes a good day, but so long as the gun is going now and then throughout the day it is enough enjoyment of the sport. It adds nothing to real pleasure to be obliged to carry two guns, or to fire them in such rapid succession that they become almost red hot, and one's arms and shoulders begin to ache. It detracts from pleasure to hear any grumbling from our host or our fellow-sportsmen over the difference of the hundreds of head of game killed in one place or another, or that everything has gone wrong during the day. Excessive preservation of game is a mistake. It is this that has provoked all the anti-game movement which has prevailed among tenant-farmers for the last few years. In the interest of sport, it is to be hoped that a reaction will set in in the direction above mentioned. People now don't sit and drink bottle after bottle of port and claret after dinner, but what men all like is good wine during the meal. Let game preservers keep just enough game on their land, and study to make the sport pleasant. When they beat the coverts let us have shoot-

ing all through the day, and send the pheasants as high as possible over our heads; but we don't want to keep driving them all into one corner, and then have them rise so fast and thick that we haven't time to load and fire without two men, in dangerous proximity to our backs, to load our guns, or to fire off a case of cartridges in ten minutes which would be enough for a whole week's shooting.

Still more recently, Mr. F. R. Bevan, fires a heavy shot at battues. On this wise: "In a good old-fashioned hotel in Southampton I have always noticed a delightful print called "Ranton Abbey," which I find is the country seat of the Earl of Lichfield, and is near Eccleshall, in Staffordshire. The artist of the picture was the late Sir Francis Grant, whose drawings of field sports are so celebrated. In this print we see my lord on his white cob, with a friend standing by another horse of about equal size. Both animals give one the idea of strong capital shooting ponies. A youth rests himself on the ground, gun in hand. Three keepers in tall hats are drawn up close together; the foremost apparently is remarking that his retriever has brought up one more pheasant. Another Labrador retriever lies at his lordship's feet. A team of four very nice field spaniels

lie or move about in front of the horses. A game cart and man are used in taking the game to the house, which is just seen in the background. To me this is a charming reminder of sport some forty years ago, when finding pheasants and shooting them was a very pleasant pursuit, quite unlike the battue system of the present time. In those days shooting was sport, a small quantity of game was sufficient, and the people went out for exercise, and to obtain and keep their health. Many days' sport there were, instead of killing everything in one single day. Wet days were short days, or no days at all. The master reared only so much game as he could use and give away to friends or to his country hospital. Many men now are simply poulterers. A cart comes from the nearest town and stands in the yard in the sight of everybody, and at the end of the day's slaughter carries all the game to market. There is so much of it, and its cost has been so enormous, that all must be sold to pay for some of its expense. I think that the unfortunate change of men from sportsmen to poulterers has been caused by the use, or rather the abuse, of railways. Country neighbours are now considered to be too poor to shoot and dine with the game preserver as they used to do, so, instead of them, pheasant rearers come by train from distant parts, so far

off that frequent visits cannot be made, and therefore a great quantity of game must be killed in all sorts of weather, as luck may favour them. How long is this sort of work of gun-firing to be tolerated? How long will Poulterer Brown try to kill more in a day than Poulterer Smith?"

Personally, I shall not indulge in any strong language about the matter, but simply content myself with saying that whatever may be the amount of sport to be derived from joining in the slaughtering work of a grand battue, of course it is not to be compared with the genuine sport derived from pheasant shooting after a more natural manner—that which I have called above rough and open shooting, because pursued more in the open field and over more or less uncultivated land. This sport has for its object mainly the naturally-bred birds, and those which have wandered from the large woods, if such covers, with their artificially reared stock, happen to be at hand. Unhappily for sportsmen, there is less and less every year of the kind of country suitable for rough pheasant shooting. What is wanted are thick hedges and broad ditches, with the growth above and below allowed to follow its own will, rough ground with patches of furze, brambles, and ferns here and there, rank tussocky grass,

and small woods, copses, and spinneys; and all this with arable land intermingled with it, and small fields of turnips, mangolds, and so forth still standing. It is in this kind of country that pheasants will breed naturally, though even in the most suitable localities they will require to be preserved against marauders, and the stock may be judiciously supplemented from time to time with hand-reared birds. But, as already noted, the suitable localities for really wild pheasants are becoming more and more limited. Modern farming is gradually civilising such districts off the face of the earth. Small fields, by the destruction of hedges, are being made into large ones, while the hedges and ditches which remain are cut and trimmed with mathematical precision and limited to the smallest possible area; small woods and copses are being stubbed up for arable land, and rough patches of furze and other encumbrances are being converted into smooth pasture or subdued to the plough. Still, in not a few counties the old-fashioned paradises for pheasants are yet to be found, and old-fashioned pheasant shooting yet to be enjoyed. October *does* "bring the pheasant" for old-fashioned sportsmen who are lucky enough to have old-fashioned shooting at their command. And there is no time more pleasant for shooting than October, the month

being generally a fine one, and in the opinion of most meteorological epicures the most enjoyable of the whole year. There is a quiet calmness about "the fall," as the west country folk still call it, most acceptable. It brings a mental and physical repose to man, a kind of rest which Nature herself seems about to take after her efforts in the spring and summer. A bright October morning, when the early mist has cleared away, though the gossamers still festoon the hedgerows and the dew or rime still lingers in the shade, is the time of all others for a quiet stroll—not too hot and not too cold, but a happy medium, which in itself heightens the enjoyment of sport or the expectation of it. There is none of that terrible exhaustion so often experienced when walking under a hot September sun, and no shivering by the woodside while the dogs and beaters are doing their work. If a man is not satisfied with the pheasant shooting October gives him in a country such as has been described, he is indeed hard to please, and can scarcely claim the title of a sportsman if he prefers to it the murderous battue.

October pheasant shooting is, indeed, true sport in such a country, presuming, of course, there is a fair sprinkling of birds. It has, to start with, one main element of all true sport, namely, a certain preliminary difficulty in finding

the game, and it calls forth most of the virtues of a true sportsman, who must be a good general and a man of tact as well as perseverance. He must know the habits of his birds—for wild-bred pheasants are very wary and full of resources—and how to work his country to the best advantage; in fact, his dispositions and plan of campaign must be carefully made and carefully executed. Let the party be one of four, or six at the most, though two will often do as much execution as more in carrying out a day's October pheasant shooting after the old fashion. An average of a beater to each gun will generally suffice. Perhaps four guns and four beaters are as good a number as any; but this must depend on local circumstances and the nature of the ground to be beaten.

As to the dogs required, a steady pointer or setter should be with the party to take a widish range occasionally—especially if large turnip or mangold fields near big covers be in the beat. Spaniels or cockers are the dogs for the close work, hedgerows, and coppices, &c.—at least, these are the dogs most fancied. But, if it be not heresy to say so, almost any dog will do which knows its business; even a sheepdog has been found of service at this work, and nondescript terriers. A dog must know you want him to flush a bird, but that not beyond the range

of your gun. When he knows this and acts upon it, he knows almost all that is requred of him ; and whether mute or noisy matters not much, though certainly a mute dog is the best. Perhaps a pottering old setter or retriever is the most useful dog in a hedgerow, though spaniels can get more easily through close underwood and various vegetable impediments, as they are smaller dogs. A dog that runs too far ahead and is not amenable to discipline is worse than useless, for he does an infinity of harm.

But let us suppose well-appointed sportsmen, intelligent beaters, and intelligent dogs, and, further, a country just suited to the sport, with a fair supply of wild pheasants and a sprinkling of tame ones out for a stroll from their coverts, there is something else wanted, as has been said, to insure a good bag. The day's work must be carried out on proper principles, and no chance thrown away by carelessness or injudicious beating. When beating fields of turnips and mangolds the side or sides nearest large woods should always be first tried, for the wary birds soon take alarm and creep away for safety. In like manner, in working hedgerows, the beat should be begun at the end which joins the woods, otherwise the birds will run down, especially if there be a ditch attached, and get into a secure harbour. It is not a bad plan for a couple

of the guns to go on ahead some little way to a gate or break in the hedgerows, and force the birds to rise, which they will the more readily do when they find enemies both front and rear: and even when all the proceedings of the day are carried out *secundum artem*, it will very often happen that though there may be plenty of birds on the shooting, somehow or other a very large proportion escape being found at all, or dodge away before the guns can get on terms with them. All things, then, taken into consideration, a successful day with the longtails in a rough open country is one of keen enjoyment and a source of pleasant satisfaction when over. The bag, too, on such days is often of that miscellaneous character in which sportsmen so much delight. A few brace of partridges have probably come to hand, a hare or two, and some rabbits, with other odds and ends, including, mayhap, an early woodcock. Such days, considered in the aspect of genuine sport, are really as superior to those devoted to battue shooting as real Indian "pig sticking" would be to prodding porkers with a pitchfork when they have their heads buried under the straw in a farmyard, or as killing a good salmon in a Highland river is to hauling out a half-starved and ravenous carp or roach from an overstocked garden pond. It is after such days that the

evening is best enjoyed, almost a winter's evening after almost a summer's day, restoring "the wasted tissue," with the good gifts Providence has provided, whiling away the pleasant hours "across the walnuts and the wine," and recounting again and again the incidents of the day as the uprising and circling smoke of the fragrant weed half enshroud the scene like the mist of an autumn morning.

Among sportsmen who prefer hunting for wild-bred pheasants in a "miscellaneous" kind of country such as I have been speaking of, and to whom the working of the dogs is the most interesting part of the day's sport, there is some diversity of opinion as to the best and most serviceable animals to use. I have just ventured to say that any dog will do which knows its work, and so it will; but of course a team of good spaniels gives the greatest pleasure. The term "spaniels" is rather a wide one, and seems to include "springers" and "cockers," which are varieties of the dog differing only in size and general appearance, and they all more or less partake of the character of undersized setters. The springer is the larger type, and has a smaller eye and greater strength and hardihood than the cocker. The Clumber spaniel, which is usually white with large lemon spots, is a springer. It is the

most fashionable of its class, and its large chest, honest eye, fine crest and mane, and squat bandy legs, are reminiscent of good bags and willing yet silent service. It is always mute, a quality in covert shooting as excellent in a hound as a low sweet voice is said to be in a woman. The Sussex spaniel has brown spots, but in other respects resembles the Clumber, and it is a matter of regret among sportsmen who uphold this breed against all others that it is becoming very scarce. The old Norfolk spaniel is another strain much fancied; and it would seem that there are several other varieties of spaniels located mainly in certain defined districts. The cockers, which are found mostly in Wales and the south-west of England, are, as I have said, a smaller type of dog. They generally give tongue when on the trail of their game, and a sportsman with a "good ear" can usually tell by their voice what kind of game they are on. They have highly delicate noses and are pretty workers, but wanting in hardihood and powers of endurance. Sometimes they are mute, but I fancy that most sportsmen like to hear their "music," though it may disturb other game than that which they are immediately hunting. Personally, I would as soon have old pointers and setters as any other dogs for working out a day's pheasant shooting in a "miscel-

laneous" country. I say "old," because allowing young dogs to potter about and hunt in hedgerows, ditches, spinneys, &c., spoils them to a great extent for ranging in the open at their proper work. I once, however, had an excellent setter, which worked anywhere and everywhere for pheasants in due season, and yet never indulged in pottering habits or showed any tendency to get to hedgerows when he knew that I wanted him to range and quarter his ground for partridges. "Sam" was the best dog I ever owned, or indeed knew, and when friends and myself started in the morning he seemed to know just as well as we did the line we were about to take, and at once adapted himself to circumstances.

Here are a few memoranda from an old book on shooting, which may be of use to young, and, perhaps, some old, sportsmen. They were written many years ago, but hold pretty true now.

Early in the morning pheasants may generally be found in hedges near the coverts, particularly after a rainy night.

About four o'clock in the afternoon is a very likely hour at which to find pheasants in turnips, carrots, or mangold, near the coverts.

Sometimes, particularly after a long flight, they are

difficult birds to put out of a hedgerow or thick covert. They lie so close that dogs may pass on both sides and yet fail to spring them, and they often perch a few feet above the ground, so as to be out of the way of the dogs' noses.

In beating for pheasants in thickset hedges or coverts, always, if possible, give your dogs the benefit of the wind, or it is very difficult to find them, particularly cunning old birds.

If disturbed in windy weather, pheasants sometimes fly far down wind, and, unless marked and brought back, the probability is that they may never return. They hate windy weather, and seldom fly against strong gales.

There is no better time at which to find pheasants out of their coverts than during the first hour or two after sunrise, at which time they go to stubbles of wheat and barley which may be near adjacent.

A straggler or two may generally be found during the day in hedges inclosing the stubbles in which they feed.

Pheasants venture farthest from woods in foggy weather: they are then soon bewildered, and know not which way to return. He who would keep his pheasants at home will not disturb them in foggy weather.

The afternoon is the best time of day for pheasant shooting; the cock birds, in particular, do not rise well until that time of day.

About two o'clock in the afternoon is the time pheasants roam about to drink; look out for them also in ditches and shady places in dry weather about that hour.

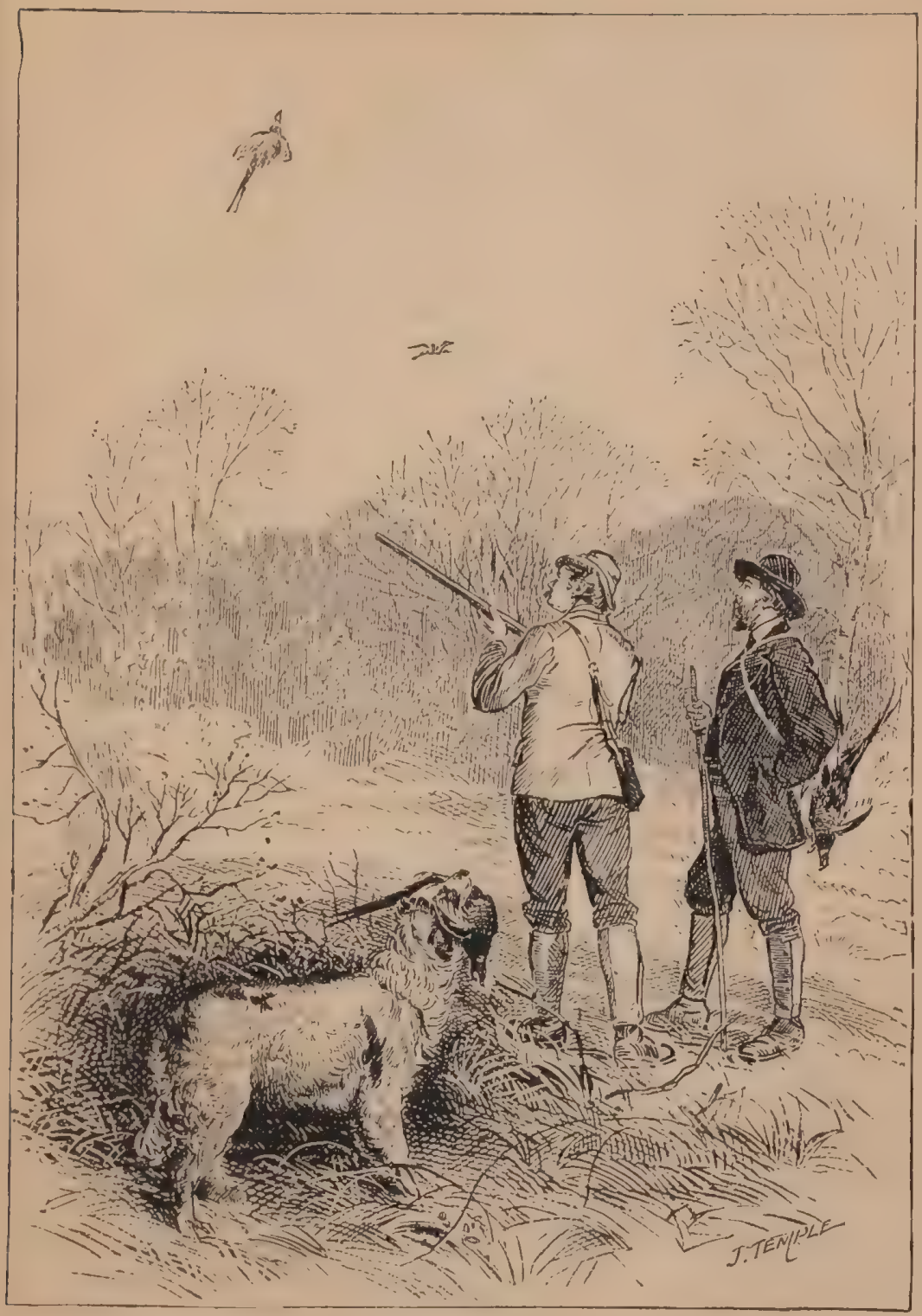
And now a word or two in reference to the act of shooting at a pheasant. The author of the book to which I have just referred says that "a pheasant is by no means a difficult shot; on the contrary, to a person accustomed to their mode of flight, they are easily brought down." I must say that I rather disagree with him. The excitement at "the warm corners" when battue shooting, the banging of innumerable guns, and the continuous rising of birds, put many a good shot off his shooting. But even allowing that the birds present easy shots under these circumstances, and that an average marksman will be able to account for most he shoots at within fair reach of him, it is otherwise when you spring pheasants, especially wild-bred ones, in a day's miscellaneous shooting, or in comparatively small coverts, when walking in a line with the beaters. Your "promiscuous" pheasant does not come to bag so readily as many sports-

men are inclined to aver. What with his judicious but disquieting habit of rising with a terrible cackle and a scream, and shooting up towards the safe side of trees, where there are any, he is more like a living firework than a semi-domestic bird.

Even the most hard-nerved sportsman can sympathise with the immortal "Mr. Briggs" of *Punch*, who, in his trepidation when his "first pheasant" rose, thought a rocket had been let off in his ear, and with all who, under similar circumstances, experience a sensation "as if an ornithological Catherine wheel had combusted almost under their noses." It is all very well for the poet Watt to say—

> But be composed, and, I believe,
> Your eye will ne'er your hand deceive.

The difficult thing is to be "composed." You are more often than not unnerved, or next door to it, as, dashing aside all opposing obstacles, the pheasant soars his way upwards—*remigio alarum*—with a mighty crashing sound which is but feebly represented by the "wroost-cuckle-rickle-wroost," attributed to the cry and desperate fluttering of the noble game bird. No, your wild "rocketer" cannot be described; he must be seen and heard; and not one sportsman out of a dozen is altogether free from



PHEASANT SHOOTING.—*A Rocketer.*

a certain kind of trepidation when he raises his gun in the hope of staying the strong and rapid flight of his game. The poet's advice runs thus:

> Should pheasants rise, be most particular;
> He rises nearly perpendicular;
> Wait a few seconds, till your sight
> Perceives his horizontal flight.

Advice easily given, as much advice about sport is, from an armchair, but by no means easily followed; and, even when you have made all kinds of good resolutions to be calm, steady, and self-possessed, and do your best to put them in practice, you will often fail; and especially if you are in the habit of using a gun with a stock much bent, for then you are particularly liable to shoot under your bird. It is all very well, again, to talk of "shooting at a haystack," as if a pheasant was as large as a turkey. Nature has endowed the bird with a liberal allowance of plumage, and has given him some long tail feathers, which may be, and constantly are, shot away without causing him much inconvenience, but his body is not so very large. He will carry away, too, a large amount of shot, and requires to be hit in the right place.

Some birds are so delicate that they will drop, however lightly hit, but a pheasant is a tolerably hardy bird, and needs to be fairly knocked down. A few stray

shots will not trouble him much. Furthermore, he flies much faster than would be guessed from his weight; and, indeed, his speed when he comes down wind and skims over the tree tops is quite astonishing. To stop such a bird, or a genuine "rocketer" neatly, is an art not attained by the many.

Gastronomically the pheasant has long and deservedly held a high place in the epicure's bill of fare. There are some persons who prefer the more pronounced flavours of the grouse, the snipe, the woodcock, and of birds generally which are eaten with their trail, and others reckon it inferior to the partridge. But *de gustibus,* &c.; and there are those who maintain that its comparative neutrality of flavour is its great recommendation. At all events, a pheasant never comes amiss, and it is very seldom indeed that anyone is found who positively has an objection to it, as some have to grouse, snipe, or hare. Moreover, in favour of the pheasant it may be said that any wine, as long as it is good, drinks well with it, and you need not fear after-searchings of heart, which result from taking the wrong kind of liquor with some other kinds of game. The Styrian pheasant is said to be the most delicate eating of its tribe.

And here I must repeat some remarks and quotations

already made in reference to the culinary virtues of the partridge. The monks of old, in France, are recorded to have had a special appreciation of the delicate richness of pheasant flesh, and seemed to have wished to monopolise the enjoyment of it. One of these, a celebrated preacher, about the year 1216, represented in one of his sermons the *pheasants*, partridges, and ortolans as addressing themselves to the clergy, and entreating to be eaten by them, and them only, that, "incorporated with their glorious bodies, they might be raised to Heaven, and not go with impious devourers to the infernal regions." At a later period the pheasant would appear to have been held in some measure sacred, since in the year 1415 we find Philip, Duke of Burgundy, and his barons, at a great feast, swearing solemnly over a roasted pheasant that they would march against the Turks, who had just overthrown the Grecian Empire. However, the stimulating and ennobling quality of the bird was not sufficiently powerful to stir any of them to the performance of their vows. Our old dramatists often speak of the pheasant. Ben Jonson, for instance, in his "Staple of News," says :

> Fetch me a *pheasant* or a brace of partridges,
> From goodwife poulterer, for my lady's supper.

And Prigg, in Beaumont and Fletcher's "Beggar's Bush," thus insists :

> I must have my capons,
> And turkeys brought me in with my green geese
> And ducklings in the season; fine fat chickens;
> And if you chance where an eye of tame *pheasants*
> And partridges are kept, see they be mine.

William Browne, the old pastoral poet, suggests for certain purposes,

> *Pheasant* and partridge into jelly turned,
> Grated with gold, seven times refined and burned,
> And dust of orient pearl.

Archbishop Neville, we are told, at a great feast in the middle of the fifteenth century, had two hundred pheasants on his table. Going still further back, we find the ancient Romans held the bird in high estimation, its novelty and expense doubtless having an attraction ; and Heliogabalus, in his ostentation, is recorded to have fed his lions with its flesh.

Our modern poets have not overlooked the pheasant in its culinary aspect. Thus, for instance, Mortimer Collins, in his gastronomic sonnet for October, says :

> October! month of the climax! King of Game,
> The *pheasant*, of beech-copse peerless denizen,
> Deserves the epicure's right earnest benison.

As is the case with the hen capercailzie and some other

birds, the *hen* pheasant is better eating than the cock, and hence *gourmets* regret that in covert shooting the law is to spare the majority of the hens, but to kill the cocks right and left, a necessary provision, however, owing to the polygamous nature of the birds. An old cock bird is a very difficult one to reduce to a state fit for table, as he is tough and insipid. Daniel, in his "Rural Sports," gives the following recipe for dealing with him: "After due keeping, stuff the bird with the lean inside of a sir-loin of beef, cut into thin slices and well seasoned; the gravy issuing from the beef gradually diffuses itself through the flesh of the game, and renders it mellow and juicy." Scott, in his "British Field Sports," says that "the hen pheasant is the most juicy and fine flavoured, and it is customary in Suffolk to make the addition of oysters to the gravy for hare and pheasant;" but I am inclined to think that few persons would be found to agree with this combination. Indeed, a good hen bird, after hanging a sufficient time to get fairly high, but not putrid, needs no stuffing, or condiments, or sauces, save the traditional bread sauce with which it has been so long associated in this country; but it is quite allowable to eat with it a little boiled streaky pork. Brillat Savarin's recipe for stuffing a pheasant with snipe, &c., and producing

the dish "Faisan á la Sainte Alliance," is all very well, and those who have tasted it properly served at a first-class Parisian restaurant will never question its excellency. But, as I have said, a good pheasant needs no such assistance to make it palatable. Sydney Smith said he knew no purer earthly pleasure than eating pheasant with bread sauce, and therefore, with the bread sauce as an adjunct, let us be content.

Apropos of the return of the game season of 1879, a writer in the *Lancet* warned us against the danger of eating the pellets of shot which are often found in the flesh of birds, hares, and rabbits, at table. We were to fear lead poisoning and various internal disarrangements from the effects of the swallowed shot! Now we must not be ungrateful to the *Lancet*, which is always very solicitous as to our bodily welfare, for its warning; but I question whether anybody ever died or even suffered from eating shot in game. In the first place, the shot is very seldom eaten at all, for, unless a person absolutely bolts his food, the presence of shot is soon detected, and the obnoxious intruders are at once rejected; and, in the second place, when they are swallowed accidentally they soon pass through the system. The only injury we are in danger of is to our teeth when they suddenly come upon

the shot, especially if it is hard or chilled shot. So little damage can swallowed shot, even in larger quantities than an eater of game could ever take it, do our system, that I have known it taken as a medicine. A friend's gardener in Hertfordshire suffered from what is generally known as heartburn, but what he called "rising of the lights," and his remedy from time to time was swallowing a tobacco-pipeful of shot. I cannot say that this cured him of his ailment, though he considered that it gave him temporary relief in "keeping the lights down;" but at all events, the shot seemed to do him no harm. Indeed, it seems that the poor pheasants suffer more from eating shot than do their consumers, as evidence has come to hand that birds in coverts, where there has been a great deal of shooting, have died from lead poisoning through picking up pellets of shot with their food. A correspondent of the *Field*, not long ago, stated that his gamekeeper had brought him a pheasant which had become paralysed in its legs, and was in very low condition. On killing and opening it, he found in its gizzard as many as thirteen shots of various sizes, which it had evidently swallowed for small pebbles to assist in the digestion of its food. The lead was being gradually disseminated through the system by the grinding action of the gizzard, and the

bird was being slowly poisoned by it. Shot, as I have said, soon pass through the human system, and pass whole, but this does not happen in the case of birds which, unlike unfeathered bipeds, are provided with internal mills for grinding their food. The loss of pheasants from lead-poisoning is likely to become more and more common as the reckless expenditure of powder and shot increases in covert shooting.

HARES.

HARES.

I NEED hardly say that Hares are not "game" in the same sense of the word as grouse, partridges, and pheasants; but as they are among the animals *feræ naturæ*, which form the sportsman's quarry, they are entitled to a full recognition in these "Notes."

The Hare belongs to that Order of Mammalia which is termed Glires or Rodentia "Rodents," *i.e.*, animals which "gnaw" their food. They have none of the sharp teeth called "canine," such as those in lions and other animals which seize and destroy living creatures, but in the front of each jaw there are two long flat teeth, slightly curved, and having a kind of chisel edge for rasping away wood or other articles. The constant labour which these teeth (called "incisors," from the Latin word *incido*, "I cut") undergo would rapidly wear

them away; and therefore to counteract this loss, they are constantly growing and being pushed forward, so that as fast as the upper parts are worn away they are replenished from the root. So constant is this increase that when an unfortunate hare or other rodent has lost one of its incisors, the opposite one, meeting nothing to stop its progress, continually grows until sometimes it curls over the lips, and prevents the wretched owner from eating. In the same Order of Rodentia, and so allied to hares, are mice, beavers, squirrels, porcupines, jerboas, and marmots.

The Family name of Hares is that of Leporidæ, containing only two species, the Common Hare (*Lepus timidus*), and the rabbit (*Lepus cuniculus*). The word *Lepus* is from the old Greek λέπορις (collat. form of λαγώς), which is akin to the Sanscrit *langh*, "to leap," and thus it signifies "the leaping animal." From Plautus we find that it was used by the Romans, like the names of the quail and the sparrow (*passer*) and dove as a term of endearment, as in Cas. 1, 50, we have "Meus pullus passer, mea columba, mi lepus." The English word *Hare* is from the Anglo-Saxon *Hara*, which we find in various languages, for instance, the Dutch, the Swedish, and Old German, and in various forms. Junius

suggests that the Anglo-Saxon *hær*, the "hair," is the source of the word referring to the declaration of Pliny that the "hare is the *hairiest* creature of all others." Another etymologist refers it to the Anglo-Saxon *har,* "hoary" or "white," while yet another will have it from the German *har-en,* "to cry out"—"quod hiberno tempore acutissime clamat," *i.e.*, because its cry is more shrill during winter. And yet again, one of the learned suggests that the noun *hare* "is not improbably of the same origin as the old English verb *to hare*, and that the name was given to the animal because of its terrors when *harried* or pursued by *harriers.*" Clarendon, in his "Civil Wars," and Locke "On Education," both use the verb *to hare* in the sense of "frightening." Here, then, is a pretty wide choice in the way of etymology.

Rightly is the hare called *timidus*, as a more shy and timid animal does not exist. Thus it came to be considered cowardly, and in Bishop Hall we find the line,

To rouse thine *hare's heart* from her cowardice.

Skinner connects the expression "hare-brained" (originally written *hair* or *haire*) with the verb to *hare*, and with the well-known adage, "As mad as a March hare." This saying is based on the fact that in this month, which is their first rutting season, hares are

always on the *qui vive*, frequently moving and shifting from their forms even in the open day—Jack hares especially, which, from their constant exercise, afford in March the best runs before harriers.

Some naturalists have termed the hare family *Dasypoda*, which in the Greek signifies "hairy-footed," the hind feet being covered with hair, which gives the animal a firmer foothold—an admirable arrangement, aiding the enormous power of propulsion existing in the long hind legs of the animal. I have been told, or have read somewhere, that a hare can run faster up-hill than down, but I doubt it.

We have two varieties of hares in these islands, the Common Hare (*timidus*) and the Alpine or Mountain Hare (*Lepus variabilis*), so called from its changing colour at different seasons of the year. By some the latter is termed the Scotch hare, because it is found in great abundance in the northern parts of Scotland. It is smaller than the common hare, and its ears are shorter than the head, and black towards the tips. Like the Arctic fox, and the ermine, and the ptarmigan grouse (as already mentioned), it changes colour as the winter approaches. The transition is gradual, the tawny grey of its summer coat beginning to show a change about

the middle of September. Before the end of the month all the four feet are white, and the ears and muzzle of a brighter colour. The white generally ascends the legs and thighs, and whitish spots are observed under the grey hairs, which continue to increase till the end of October; but still the black remains of a grey colour, while the eyebrows and ears are nearly white. From this period the change of colour advances very rapidly, and by the middle of November, the whole fur, with the exception of the tips of the ears, which remain black, is of a shining white, the black taking only eight days to turn colour. Most naturalists speak of this transformation as an actual "change of coat," and shedding of the entire fur; but I believe the correct view is that there is no such shedding of the fur at all, and that no hair falls from the animal, the transformation being effected simply by a change of the fluid colouring in the hairs; just as there is a change in the colouring of the feathers in many birds without moulting. The fur continues white till the month of March, or even later, according to the temperature of the atmosphere, and by the middle of May it has again assumed its grey colour. But the spring change is different from that of the winter, as in the former there is a complete shedding of the

hair and absolute change of coat. We are naturally led to inquire what benefit the animals receive from this periodical change, and it is not difficult to arrive at a satisfactory answer. Colour has a great influence on the ratio at which bodies cool. It is an established law that surfaces which reflect heat most readily allow it to escape very slowly by radiation. White objects reflect most readily, consequently there will be a proportionate difficulty in their radiation of heat. If a black animal and a white one were placed in a higher temperature than that of our own bodies, the heat would enter the black one with the greatest rapidity, and soon elevate its temperature considerably above that of the other. These differences manifest themselves in wearing black and white coloured clothing during hot weather. Thus, if animals are placed in a temperature considerably lower than their own, the animal which is black will give out its heat by radiation to the surrounding objects sooner than the white one, which will part with its heat at a much slower rate. Hence it would appear that the clothing of animals is often especially suited in colour to the temperature of the localities they inhabit. It is on this principle that we wear white clothing when we can in the summer. And for the same reason we should wear white

clothing in the winter, as medical writers often recommend us to do. There can be no doubt of the soundness of the advice, but in the metropolis and large centres of population, during the months when smoke surrounds us like a fog, and "blacks" fall "as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa," white costumes would very soon be the worse for wear—in fact they are impossibilities.

But doubtless there is another reason why mountain hares are endowed with the gift of changing colour, namely, that they may have a better chance of escaping their numerous enemies. In many northern countries, keen-eyed and voracious birds of prey are much more numerous than in Britain, and in winter the poor hares would probably be soon exterminated, did not their change of colour assimilate with the snow, and so render them by no means distinguishable objects even to the cleverest of falcons a few hundred yards distant.

In 1878 several specimens of the *Lepus variabilis* were brought from Russia, and deposited in the Jardin d' Acclimation at Paris. I should be glad to know whether they have kept up their old habit of turning colour in their confinement and comparatively warm temperature, and still enjoy their old faculty now that the use of it is gone.

There is no need to give a description of the common hare, as it is almost as well known, even to children, as a cat or a dog. It can hardly be said to be a pretty animal, though its dark lustrous eyes are very beautiful, and the capers it cuts are graceful enough, as those who have seen hares at their gambols on the hard snow beneath a bright moon are well aware. They are interesting animals, however, from a natural history point of view, some of their habits and customs being very singular. That of making "forms" out in the open fields and sitting in them all day strikes me as one of the most remarkable. I can quite understand their leaving the woods as they generally do when the noise of the falling leaves would keep them in a constant state of alarm; but I cannot see why they should not return when the woods are bare, but prefer to "form" in the fields, and especially on the cold barren fallows, which they most affect. A more cheerless, wretched existence than sitting all day in a form in a ploughed field I cannot imagine, and one would almost think that they were in great danger of getting stiff with rheumatism.

Perhaps they get through the day mostly in sleep! I have heard it said that they sleep with only one eye closed, but I never yet came upon a hare with either eye shut.

Most of us know how difficult it is to "spot," or more correctly speaking to "soho," a hare on its form. It seems almost a gift; as some persons cannot see a hare when you point it out to them within a few yards of their noses, while others seem to be able to detect one a hundred yards or more away. Some old coursers have a marvellous faculty in this line; and it is said they almost invariably spot the hare by "catching its eye."

A hare is credited with the clever dodge of taking a long leap into a form, before seating herself, so as to cut off the scent, especially after being pursued by hounds. I am not in a position to endorse the truth of this statement; nor that of Mr. J. D. Dougall, who says that you can readily distinguish the sex of hares as they sit in their forms, "the buck keeping his ears firm and close to the head, and the doe lying with hers open and distended." I have certainly seen some hundreds of hares in their forms, and my impression is that they all keep their ears very close when observed by the human eye. Mr. Frank Buckland says, "The colour of the fur is very much that of ploughed or fallow land, and *his ears are always stuck back flat on his shoulders*," when in the form. Mr. Buckland further observes, that "When he gets up to run, he does not look at all like the same

animal. He will then cock his ears straight up in the air, as though there were wires in them." Here, however, I am somewhat at variance with Mr. Buckland. That hares generally, perhaps in nine cases out of ten, cock their ears when put up, I admit; but I have noticed that for the first few yards they will often keep their ears as flat on their shoulders as when they were in their forms; and I have occasionally seen them keep their ears down for twenty yards or more, apparently being under the impression they were slinking away unnoticed. Mr. Buckland also observes that "it is surprising how he can stand upright, as it were, upon his hinder legs." Mr. Buckland does not say under what circumstances the hare thus stands upright, but probably he means when it is indulging in gambols by moonlight. I can, however, mention a very curious instance of a hare standing thus bolt upright. I was walking some years ago a field on my own shooting, known as "Hare-field," so called because it adjoined a road and some houses called "Hare-street" (a very common name in Hertfordshire), and a hare got up off a stubble within twenty yards of me, and instead of running away at once, erected itself on its hind legs, and danced a sort of pirouette for some seconds in a most

comical manner. Afterwards, when it made off, I had not the heart to shoot at this grotesque performer, though I much wanted a hare "for the pot." Hares also must stand on their hind legs when they nip off the green ears of wheat at the top of the stalk. By the way, this "Hare-field," which had an area of some forty acres or more, was on a considerable slope, and had an aspect due north, and it was always the best find both for partridges and hares on my shooting, a fact which militates against the often expressed view that game prefer a southern aspect. Moreover, I always found that the hill side with a due southern aspect, opposite "Hare-field," never held a quarter as much game as "Hare-field" itself.

Sportsmen, either with guns or hounds, must have often noticed that hares, as a rule, form within thirty or forty yards of a hedge, but if there is a slight hollow in any part of a field (like the "dell-holes" in parts of Hertfordshire), there is no more likely place for a hare than on the side of it. After the corn is cut hares will be found on the stubbles, though many prefer the woods. There is a story of an old courser, whose "ruling passion" showed itself "strong in death," imparting when *in extremis* a valuable bit of information to his

son about hares. Beckoning the lad to his bedside, he whispered into his ear, "Jack, I have little more to say, but always look for a hare on an *oat* arish directly after harvest," and with these words his earthly course was finished. Hares are very fond of market garden ground, the parsley having a special attraction for them, and they love to lie in parsnip beds. Over the garden ground in Essex, mentioned in the chapter on partridges, within ten miles of London, and in sight of the dome of St. Paul's in bright weather, I have put up a dozen hares or more in a day when working for partridges.

Hares are credited with having the curious fancy for lying within the sound of a dog's bark. I have noticed that they do so lie, particularly on the Essex marshes, and along their borders, where I have frequently found them within hail of the small farmhouses, or the marshmen's cottages, which are dotted over these grassy wilds.

In some of the Essex marsh districts hares are called "Sarahs,"—why so I cannot say; and in many parts of England they enjoy the name of "pussies."

I have never been able to ascertain how often a hare changes its form if undisturbed, but I am inclined to think it will keep to the same for a fortnight or longer, unless the wind shifts and blows strongly from an

opposite quarter to that which it was in when the form was first made. Hares prefer to sit with the wind in their faces, as when it blows from behind them it ruffles up their fur and must make them feel specially uncomfortable. Hence it is probable that where two or three forms looking in different directions are found near together they belong or belonged to but one hare.

Hares are certainly very prolific animals, breeding, like rabbits, several times in the season. It is said instances have been found of hares being in kindle with no less than six young ones; but probably these were cases in which the singular process of superfetation was taking place, for it is well-known to naturalists that two sets of baby hares may be maturing for birth at the same time in one doe. As a rule, a hare only produces two at a litter, sometimes three, and very rarely more. As an instance of the fecundity of hares, the Rev. B. Daniel relates "that a brace of hares were inclosed in a large walled garden, and proper plants supplied for their sustenance. At the end of twelve months the garden was examined, and the produce was fifty-seven hares, including the original parents." I have heard that owing to the different and better kind of herbage they get at

the Antipodes, the progeny of the English hares, which were imported some years ago into the colony, has developed certain qualities superior to those of the ancestral stock, and that Australian hares of the present time are faster and more enduring before greyhounds than English ones; and further, that, instead of two or three at a litter, they produce four or five, and even more.

Mr. Simeon, in his "Stray Notes on Fishing and Natural History," says that there is a popular notion that the white star which is sometimes seen on the hare's forehead is a sign that there were more than one in the litter. He adds that, in his opinion, it is unlikely that any such distinction should exist, but that a keeper told him, in proof of the theory, that he had once found a litter of four, just laid down, all of which were thus marked. I must confess that I have never heard or read, except in Mr. Simeon's Notes, of this "popular notion," which, by the way, he says he believes is "rather general;" and as two leverets at a litter are very much more common than one, it would follow that almost all hares would have the white star—which, as a matter of fact, they have not.

Accidental variations of colour occasionally occur in hares. Captain Brown, in the notes to his edition of

"White's Selborne," says that a black hare was shot at Combe, near Coventry, in February, 1828, and that another was killed at Netley, Shropshire, by the Rev. F. W. Hope. Several instances of parti-coloured hares have been reported of late years from different districts in England, and it has been urged that they were "crosses between the blue and brown hare;" but they must have only been varieties of our common hare, as the blue or Scotch hare does not occur in England.

The average weight of an English hare may be put at 6lb. to 7lb.; but many go beyond this. The heaviest I ever killed scaled 10lb.; but this is a mere nothing compared with one stated to have weighed 13lb. 14oz., which was killed by the keeper on the estate of the Misses Farrington at Worden, and served at the rent audit dinner on December 11, 1878, at the Railway Hotel, Leland. In the *Field*, of October 28, 1876, there is the record of a hare weighing 13lb. 4oz. having been killed by Mr. Henderson on the Longwitten Estate, near Morpeth, Northumberland.

An interesting question has been raised in reference to the Mosaic prohibition of the hare as food. All animals, as Biblical students are aware, were forbidden, except those which "divide the hoof and chew

the cud." The ox, the sheep, and the goat were lawful food because they fulfilled both conditions: the pig was prohibited because it did not chew the cud, though it divided the hoof; and the hare is specified with the camel and coney as also prohibited, because they did not divide the hoof, though they chewed the cud. Now, as a matter of fact, the hare does *not* chew the cud. It is not one of the ruminant animals, but, as I said at the beginning of this note on "Hares," a rodent. It has neither the character of teeth nor the fourfold stomach of animals which chew the cud. But to an ordinary observer the hare *seems* to chew the cud. When reposing at its ease it continually moves its jaw about as if actually chewing something, and the action might easily be mistaken for true rumination. In reality, this mumbling or grinding of the teeth is performed by instinct, its result being the preservation of the edge and shape of the chisel-like "incisor" teeth, the hare rubbing its teeth together instead of working them, as do other rodents (especially rabbits in wooden hutches) on various hard substances, to keep them in order. The Rev. J. G. Wood explains the Mosaic statement by saying that the hare was spoken of as chewing the cud because it *appeared* to do so, and the object was to guard the Jews against mis-

taking the hare for one of the ruminants which were permitted as food. And he adds that they would in all probability have fallen into that mistake, from the fact that Arabs are exceedingly fond of the flesh of the hare, and accept it as well as the camel as lawful food, *because it chews the cud,* the division of the hoof not being considered by them as essential. I cannot say that this explanation is quite satisfactory to my mind, but I quote it for what it is worth, and it must always be remembered in connection with questions of Biblical difficulty and interpretation that the Bible was never meant as a "handbook of science," and that in physical matters it speaks in language suited to the knowledge, and in accordance with the phraseology, of the times in which the different books were written.

The hare, as I have said, is rightly called *timidus,* as it is one of the most timid and shy of creatures, and very difficult indeed to tame. Some years ago I tried very hard to tame a leveret which I caught when apparently about a fortnight or three weeks old. It lived for six or seven weeks, but showed no inclination to become tame, as young rabbits do when frequently and kindly handled. Mr. Frank Buckland two years ago thus wrote of a hare which was given to him: "In a hutch all by himself was

a live hare, which, when quite a little thing, had been caught by a dog. Mr. Hoad very kindly gave me this hare, in order that I might see what I could do in taming it. When I turned the hare, which I called Joe, down on to the floor of my own room, he exhibited great alarm, rushing about the room in all directions, eventually concealing himself behind some books. He is now living in a hutch by himself. The poor thing is quiet enough, and I think he is getting a little tame. From his look, I think he must have some intelligence, for he watches me about the room with his beautiful dark brown eyes. He seems to know I am his friend." But, he adds, "From what I have seen of the hare, I think it will be very difficult to get him at all tame." I never heard how Mr. Buckland progressed afterwards in his attempt. St. James long ago said that "Every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind"; and certainly hares are in this category, as many of us have seen performing hares in the London streets.

Most of us, too, have read something about the poet Cowper's tame hares. At the end of an edition I have of his works, 1810, there is an account filling seven pages, written by himself of these hares, dated 28th May, 1784,

which appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, I suppose about that time. Perhaps it would be interesting to some of my readers if I gave an epitome of it. In 1774 he took charge of three leverets, and set about taming them, by way of amusement, when, as he says, he was so indisposed in mind and body as to be incapable of diverting himself either with company or books. He named his little pets Puss, Tiney, and Bess—though, as a matter of fact, they were all males—and built three wooden hutches for them, in which they slept at night, "each retiring to his own bed, and never intruding into that of another." In the daytime they had the range of his hall. Puss soon grew familiar, would leap into his lap and sleep there, and suffer himself to be taken up and carried about. During an illness of three days the poet carefully nursed and tended him, and after his recovery he says that no creature could be more grateful, a sentiment he displayed by most significantly licking his benefactor's hand. Cowper was also in the habit of carrying Puss after breakfast into the garden, where he generally hid himself under the leaves of a cucumber vine, "sleeping or *chewing the cud* till evening"; the poet by the way in this remark showing that he was not a learned naturalist. Puss highly appreciated these outings in the

garden, and often intimated his impatience to be taken out by drumming on Cowper's knees, by putting on "a look of such expression as it was not possible to misinterpret," and by pulling at the skirts of his coat with his teeth. In fact, Puss became perfectly tamed, and, his natural shyness being completely overcome, "was much happier in human society than when shut up with his natural companions."

Not so Tiney. Kind treatment had no effect upon him. When stroked he would grunt, strike with his fore feet, and bite. "He was, however," says the poet, "very entertaining in his way; even his surliness was matter of mirth, and in his play he preserved such an air of gravity, and performed his feats with such solemnity of manner, that in him, too, I had an agreeable companion." Bess, who died soon after he was full grown, differed greatly from his companions. Puss was tamed by gentle usage; Tiney was not tamed at all, strictly speaking; but Bess "had a courage and confidence which made him tame from the beginning."

Cowper always admitted his pets into the parlour after supper, where they "would frisk, and bound, and play a thousand gambols, the carpet affording their feet a firm hold." He observes that "each had a

character of his own," and that their countenances were expressive of that character. He remarks, also, that his hares had a singular sagacity in discovering the minutest alteration that was made about the haunts to which they were accustomed, applying their noses to the examination of any new object, even so trifling as a patch in the carpet put in to fill up a hole which had been burnt in it. They seemed to be much directed by "smell" in the choice of favourites: to some persons, though they saw them daily, they could never be reconciled, and would even scream when they attempted to touch them; but a miller coming in engaged their affections at once, his powdered coat apparently having charms which were irresistible. [Mr. Buckland remarks on the sense of smell in hares, stating that on making a section of a hare's skull he found that the organs of smell were very much developed]. On one occasion a cat which was in the room ventured to pat Bess upon the cheek, and got in return for her impudence such a "drumming" on the back that she was glad to make her escape. On another, a spaniel, that had never seen a hare, was introduced to Puss, who, before then, had never seen a spaniel. Puss showed no fear towards "Marquis," nor "Marquis" any hostility to Puss; and so Cowper concluded

that there was "no natural antipathy between hare and dog." They became most sociable and friendly together.

Cowper makes some interesting remarks on the diet of hares. He says, "I take it to be a general opinion that they graze, but it is an erroneous one, at least grass is not their staple; they seem rather to use it medicinally, soon quitting it for leaves of almost any kind. Sow-thistle, dandelion, and lettuce are their favourite vegetables, especially the last. I discovered by accident that the fine white sand is in great estimation with them. I suppose as a digestive. It happened that I was cleaning a bird-cage while the hares were with me. I placed a pot filled with such sand upon the floor, which being at once directed to by a strong instinct, they devoured voraciously; since that time I have taken care to see them well supplied with it. They account green corn a delicacy, both blade and stalk, but the ear they seldom eat. Straw of any kind, especially wheat straw, is another of their dainties. They will feed greedily upon oats, but if furnished with clean straw never want them." He further notes that his hares relished small quantities of aromatic herbs, particularly musk, and ate with evident pleasure twigs of hawthorn, and of the common briar. He made bread, however, their principal food, cutting it

into small squares, and, in the winter, when there was a dearth of vegetables, mingling with it shreds of carrot and apple parings. He also supplied them with water as a substitute for the juice of summer herbs. The food was always placed in pans in their dormitories, as they only fed at evening and in the night.

Tiney lived to be nearly nine years old, and died at last, as Cowper says he had reason to think, of some hurt in the loins by a fall. When he wrote the account of his hares Puss was still living, having just completed his tenth year, "discovering no signs of decay, nor even of age, except that he is grown more discreet and less frolicsome than he was." A memorandum was found among the poet's papers to this effect: "Tuesday, 9th March, 1786. This day died poor Puss, aged 11 years 11 months. He died between 12 and 1 at noon, of mere old age, and apparently without pain." Tiney was buried beneath a walnut in the garden of the poet, who composed an epitaph of eleven stanzas on him, the first of which runs thus:

Here lies whom hound did ne'er pursue,
Nor swifter greyhound follow,
Whose foot ne'er tainted morning dew
Nor ear heard huntsman's hallo'.

Puss was honoured with a Latin epitaph as follows:

Hic etiam jacet,
Qui totum novennium vixit
PUSS.
Siste paulisper,
Qui præteriturus es,
Et tecum reputa—
Hunc neque canis venaticus,
Nec plumbum missile,
Nec laqueus,
Nec imbres nimii,
Confecere:
Tamen mortuus est—
Et moriar ego.

Which, being translated, is to this effect—"Here too lies Puss, who lived nine years; Stranger stay awhile and reflect with yourself. Him, neither hound, nor shot from gun, nor noose, nor storm destroyed; and yet he died—and I too must die." There seems, however, to be some discrepancy between this epitaph and the memorandum above quoted as to the age of Puss.

And now a few words about shooting hares. But the question may fairly be asked whether hares ought to be shot at all. The hare gives sport before harriers, beagles, and greyhounds, and therefore it might be argued it should be as sacred from the gun as the fox is.

But the answer to this is that there are many more

hares than foxes, and that a supply of the former for hunting can always be obtained with little or no difficulty, whereas foxes have to be very carefully preserved. Moreover, hares are wanted for "the pot," which foxes are not, and though the former can hardly be credited with conducing sensibly to the increase of our food supply, still some hundreds of thousands of hares are eaten every year in this country, and if they were not shot very few would come to hand. In driving covers, therefore, and in shooting in the open, it seems to me a perfectly legitimate thing to shoot hares as they get up, unless you are in a district where coursing is a conspicuous feature in the local sport. Under such circumstances a sportsman, even though he may not care much about coursing, should be chary in killing hares with the gun, as coursing them gives amusement to the many and shooting them only to the few. And, after all, a hare under ordinary circumstances is such a very easy shot, even for a tyro, that a true sportsman must often feel something akin to shame when he kills one, notwithstanding a certain satisfaction in seeing it stopped neatly, turn a somersault, and die on the spot. The old lines seem to commend themselves, notwithstanding the faulty rhythm of the last, and the

experiment already mentioned made by Cowper, and the amicable relations between "Marquis" and "Puss."

> And let the courser and the hunter share
> Their just and proper title to the hare.
> * * * * * *
> The tracing hound by nature was designed
> Both for the use and pleasure of mankind;
> Form'd for the hare, the hare, too, for the hound,
> In enmity each to each other bound.

Still, as I have said, we cannot depend on dogs for our hare supply.

Be it remembered, however, that it is possible to miss a hare. The young sportsman should therefore keep in mind the old rule of aiming at the tips of the ears of a hare, or where they would be if they are pricked, when the hare is running nearly in a straight line away from the gun, and, if it is crossing, of aiming well in advance. He should also shoot well ahead in turnips and mangold.

He should not shoot at a hare under twenty or twenty-five yards distance, except, perhaps, when it is close to a furrow, down which it will almost invariably turn, and thus destroy the chance of getting a fair shot. If a hare, as sometimes is the case, runs towards the gun and stops, the sportsman by a slight movement or sound can easily

turn it, when it will present a good shot. A hare may be killed, when running "broadside on," with a good gun loaded with No 4 or 5 shot, at from 60yds. to 65yds. It ought always to fall at about 50yds. Sportsmen should also remember that a hare will often go away with some shot in it, though apparently not struck, and die at a considerable distance off. I have noted several instances of this. One I particularly well remember. I had well covered a hare within 30yds., and felt certain I had hit it, though it made no sign of having been touched. Down a long hillside it went, by the edge of some turnips, crossed a grass valley, jumping a small brook in the bottom, and up the opposite hill, apparently as comfortably as ever, over a big stubble. I was following its movements with my opera glass, which I generally carry when shooting, determined, as Hood says, "to see it out of sight," and I noticed that it suddenly stopped and fell. We walked to the spot and found it quite dead, the distance from where it got up to where it fell being a long way towards a quarter of a mile. If the ground had not been open, or if it had been hit in cover, it would have got away and died without anyone, except by mere chance, being the wiser. On another occasion I shot at a hare within fifty yards of a gate, and thought I had

missed it, in so unconcerned a manner did puss continue her journey and pass under the lower bar of the gate. More out of curiosity than anything else, I walked to the gate and mounted the third bar, in order to well survey the field on the other side. I could see nothing of the hare, however, but on getting down from the gate saw her lying dead under my nose. There is hardly any saying to what distance a hare will drag itself with a broken hind leg. A sportsman should therefore be very persevering, if he has anything like a reliable dog, in following up a hare thus wounded. Hares, when wounded, will often get into the ditch and creep into the burrow of a rabbit. Most sportsmen are aware of the expediency of "watering" a hare by pressing its belly before putting it into the game bag.

A very curious accident with two hares was recorded in the *Field* some time ago as having happened on the Rice Estate, near Andover. A correspondent of the paper wrote as follows: "We were beating a large piece of turnips, which was bounded by a small covert, and a broad grass drive between the turnips and the covert, when a brace of hares were started, which made for the covert; the hare on the left got into the drive first, turned sharp to the right along the drive, and the right hand hare

took a straight course to the covert, and was seen by the keeper and one of the beaters to come into collision with the other hare, striking it on its hind-quarters, breaking both of its hind legs at the hock. The off hind leg of the other hare was badly splintered, the splinter entering the right eye of the right-hand hare, and killing it. The other hare crawled into the turnips, and was picked up by the beater. I may add that no hare had been shot at on that beat since the beginning of the season."

There is an objection to shooting hares when using good spaniels in cover, as it has a tendency to spoil them for pheasant and cock shooting, dogs naturally owning the scent of game which is killed to them.

Hare-driving is sometimes resorted to in Scotland by way of a day's sport, and in order to thin down the "vermin." The following portion of a description, written a few years ago, of such a drive on the Grampians, may prove interesting:

"To-morrow there is to be a tremendously big hare-drive, and you will be able to count your spoil, such as it is, by the hundred head. You fall asleep hopeful, but awake about half-past four to wonder what that noise can be. It is no use attempting to deceive yourself—it is raining in torrents. The 'glass' is not much use, it

would seem, here in the heart of these hills. They have local perturbations ten times in the twenty-four hours that no Fitzroy could possibly register. You fall asleep again, to find it, at seven a.m., just 'clearing up.' Everybody knows what 'clearing up' means in Scotland. It means the cessation of a repetition of the Deluge, a returning vista of some hundred yards, the ground smoking and steaming like a newly-made hotbed, and a rift in the long dense pall of cloudland about the size of a crack in a good size melon. Are you to go? Yes; certainly. After considerable efforts, the keepers have got a number of beaters together, and you can see some of them in the stable-yard waiting to have their first dram and be away with the keepers and the game cart. Let them go, and we will follow. You have asked all the farmers in your 'march' to come and join in shooting the hares, but only one of them, you hear, can come. The rest are weaning their lambs. So we shall be short of drivers, too. Breakfast despatched, we start, under a cloud, or rather in a cloud, and follow on our ponies the stride of the lithe, clean-limbed, kilted young stripling ahead. The guns have been sent on, ensconced in waterproofs, and we are wrapped up in similar fashion. The cloud aforesaid having been joined by a few more,

pours itself over us in the form of a deliberate drizzle. As we get higher it gets worse. We see nothing behind, nothing before, nothing around. One of the party at least feels disposed to exclaim with Hamlet, 'Why, what a fool am I!' Why go on? The only conceivable reason that can be given for our doing so is that man, and the Englishman especially, is a stupid, dogged animal, who follows the resolution made in the morning as though it were a divine command. Turning back is not to his taste; so on we go, through bog, through mire, through mist, and driving wet.

"After the best part of two hours of this sort of thing, we come upon the group of keepers, gillies, beaters, boys, dogs, and the rest of it. They are sitting in a picturesque group under the shelter, such as it is, of a little knoll. The farmer, too, is there, who has obligingly come to help us, and who would surely think it a nuisance of nuisances, were it not that he sees an opportunity of exterminating his enemies. You would not think there was much in the Grampians for the hares to spoil by eating and nibbling; but the farmer says that they are such 'dirty' creatures, and do harm in that way. We sportsmen naturally wish to banish them from the land, for they spoil scent and distract one's dogs. Well, are we to go for-

ward? The whisky goes round the group once more, and we know that is the signal for a start. There are only some twenty fellows to drive, all wanted—ten fewer than we ought to have. Most of them are 'crofters'—men who rent an acre of ground near Loch Rannoch, and live on the produce of that land and on what they can contrive to pick up in the shooting season. They will receive three shillings to-day, a substantial luncheon, plenty of whisky, and, if we are lucky, three or four hares apiece. We can get a bit further on our ponies, we are told, so we stick to the saddle and pick our way over some roughish and awfully wet ground, two of us getting 'bogged' for a minute. The higher we ascend the wilder it blows, the heavier and colder beats the drizzle, the denser waxes the white, shroud-like mist. The beaters, of course, are not with us, for the operation is as follows: Say there are three or four small well-defined and steepish hills one after another, but distinctly separated, the tops of which, seemingly sharp from below, are broken into four or five narrow ridges, and as many runs or slight depressions. To-day we are five guns, counting the farmer aforesaid, and one keeper, who is told off to shoot. We are posted at about equal distances of about 130 yards, so as to occupy the ridges I spoke of, and

command the respective runs or depressions. When we are fairly there, the drivers spread themselves round the base of the hill and walk up it, keeping a line, shouting and beating the ground with their sticks, and, assisted by half a dozen dogs of any sort that can be kept well in hand, will come to call, and won't attempt to range. We are all posted now. There is always a croaker in every party—though, be it added, your croaker is often the wise man of the party—and he declares that, once separated, we shall never see each other again, so dense and steadily-driving is the mist. He adds that we shall not see the hares nor each other; neither shall we hear the drivers. I bid him good-bye solemnly, and go and take my place under a grey boulder, just for the honour of the thing; for I might stand up where I liked and no hare could see me. My difficulty will be, as our croaking friend said, to see the hares.

"Presently a gun is fired, and then another, sounding for all the world like fog signals. Then there is a decided opening in the rolling layers of fog, and I see a pair of ears—another—another. Off goes a double-barrel, and pussy—one, two, three, four come scampering this way. In a second more she bites the heather, as does pussy coming from the other direction. I re-load

and fire, fire and re-load, and when the mist closes in again I know there must be a dozen prostrate enemies somewhere around me. Presently I hear the voices of the beaters and can descry one of their dogs. They come on slowly, cautiously, and before they are within shot range I have knocked over three more hares. Then the beaters drive us in, so to speak, upon each other, and we compare notes in the mist. There are fifty-eight hares altogether, in spite of adverse circumstances. By Jupiter Pluvius! there was a ray of sunlight, and the Highland keeper declares it is going to be as fine an afternoon as ever was seen. Thus encouraged, we start afresh, the beaters taking just another dram. A little chap of 11 is one of them, and one of our party asks if they are going to let him drink with the rest. They only laugh. They all seem as if whisky was mother's milk to them, as though they had been nursed on it, and had never been weaned to this day. The next hill is a trifle higher and larger, and the keeper's bold prophecy is but half fulfilled. Clouds roll up and roll away, and there is a lull; but they are swiftly followed by others. However, one sees better than before, so, though the hares, the beaters say, were fewer, we get more of them, and among us add seventy-two to the first batch.

"But it is the last beat of all that is the real sport. Scaling its face is tough work, but the reward at the summit is great indeed. By the time we reach it all the clouds have rolled off to the horizon, and we see hills upon hills, and hills on hills arise, steeped in their orange, purple, green, and crimson tints, and freckled with shadowy blots flung by the broken clouds. Loch Rannoch lies away there, a bonnie narrow strip of eleven miles, with the black forest of Rannoch and Mr. Wentworth's handsome seat distinctly visible. You catch just a glimpse of Loch Garry, and also of Loch Ericht; but Benalder Hill and Forest cut you off from Loch Laggan. The heather is short and stubby, and has in parts surrendered the ground entirely to moss and lichen and bare rough boulders. Ptarmigan are flying about; but though two shots are sent in desperation after them, they do not come fairly within range, and keep, as is their habit, on the face of the hill rather than on its summit. We have taken our places, and wondrously commanding ones they are, though none of us can quite see each other. Presently the hares come over in twos and threes, sit up, and look about them. Then they move forward, and over they roll. File-firing, as the phrase is, is a fool to it. They come in dozens, in scores, in shoals.

There would be sport for thirty guns if the ground could be found. They swarm, they scamper, they almost run over each other, and they fall like nine pins before our barrels. Where they all come from seems a mystery. If I saw one I saw four or five hundred. Bang, bang, bang, bang—it's incessant. Then comes the whoop of the beaters, the shaggy faces of the dogs, and a throwing of sticks, to prevent pups from harking back again down the hill. But, of course, many—indeed most—get away, for the guns are too few. Fifty-eight in the first beat; seventy-two in the second; and now 284—total, 414.

"On this same drive the year before last seven guns got 715. There they lie in long lines. They are all the poor, blue, mountain hare, very different from the brown Sybarite, fed upon all sorts of succulent edibles, of the cultivated plains and valleys. Some of them are big enough in one sense, but they are not plump, and their flesh is very different from the hares sent to the London markets. Fringed with blue under their bellies at this time of the year, they are quite white in winter, and match with the snow of these inhospitable regions. There are plenty of them to-day for the beaters, and plenty for all the old women about. We descend and

find our ponies again, and then have seven miles to traverse before we reach home. When half way there is a flash of lightning, followed immediately by such a rattle of thunder as is never to be heard, save in the bosom of the hills. Peal answers flash, and flash preludes peal, but the rain descends not. Half the sky is covered, half is open. The sun is setting luridly and unseen behind that rolling western ridge, whose jagged rim it tips with irregular gold, leaving this face of it in deep, unutterable gloom. The pine trunks are flushed with a glory of deep saffron colour; the gracefully bending birches above the lake look luminous in the horizontal rays, and the face of the lake itself grows purpler than the heather, almost the colour of bilberry juice or of that of newly made Beaujolais wine. Slowly dies the sunlight, slowly the weirdlike after-glow; and then the clouds close up once more, and the rain descends as though Schehallion were Ararat, and our lodge the only ark of refuge in a deluged world."

There is a good deal to be said about the hare gastronomically and economically. I can remember the time when a full-sized hare could be bought in Leadenhall Market, or in almost any poulterer's shop, for half a crown or three shillings. At this price it might be con-

sidered as one of the cheapest articles of consumption after its kind—a thorough economical family dish. And even now, at its present price of five shillings, I am not at all sure that it is the reverse, as it can be used in various ways till every bone is clean. But we must remember that in flavour and the pleasure of eating there is a vast difference between an old and a young hare, and between one in and one out of season. It is age which determines its tenderness, and this, combined with the season, its flavour. The age of a hare may be told by its ears, which, when it is young, readily split or tear; by the firmness of the jaws when pressed in the hand; and by the length of the claws, which are long and blunt in an old hare. But game dealers, I have noticed, generally test them by feeling the inside of the forelegs, as on what may be called the fetlock joint of a young hare there is a protuberance of the bone which feels almost like a shot, whereas in an old hare this protuberance is absent. You must have lessons, however, from an adept before you can always thoroughly detect this indication. The hare is in season in August, or a forward leveret much earlier, and may be said to continue in season till the end of January; but a hare before Christmas is certainly far superior to one after, and as the season progresses hares

ought not to be eaten at all. I think the present state of the law, which allows poulterers to sell hares all through the year, is a scandal. To see hares exposed for sale, say in April, May, and June, which are their chief breeding months, and when their flesh is at its worst, is an abomination, and still more so is it to see, as often may be seen on sale, leverets, hardly larger than a half grown rabbit. If this kind of thing goes on much longer, that will come to pass in many districts of England which came to pass in many districts in Ireland, viz., the actual or approximate extinction of hares. Last session of Parliament a very proper Act was passed for the protection of hares in Ireland, which renders it illegal under a penalty to kill, take, or have in possession a hare or leveret between the 20th April and the 12th August. A similar Act enforcing a "close time" in England is imperatively necessary, and I should hope that some member or members will take up this matter at once.

But to return to more immediate gastronomic matters. The hare submits itself to an infinite variety of ways of cooking. Hare soup is meat, drink, and warmth combined, and even an old hare may be used for this purpose. A roasted hare with stuffing judiciously flavoured with

aromatic herbs is a dish fit for the most exacting epicure. But there is roast hare and roast hare. The hurriedly done, dried up, half burnt creature, with skin as tough as leather, is a roast from which an educated palate recoils. You can hardly roast a hare too slowly or baste and flour it too frequently. This is the grand secret of the business. My maternal grandfather—how well I remember him forty years ago, with his top boots, drab knee breeches, with bunch of seals dangling from his fob, buff waistcoat, brass-buttoned coat, white tie, "stick-up" collars, and low broad-brimmed hat—a perfect type of John Bull, though on a small scale—was a mighty courser, and I saw my first course seated in front of him on his horse. He would not hesitate for a moment to hang a dog that ran cunning, nor, I believe, for the matter of that, a cook either who spoilt or suffered to be spoilt a roast hare. To obviate this catastrophe, when a hare was put down, so also was a boy from the farm had in to baste without intermission as long as the hare gyrated on the jack. Woe betide him if the cook or my grandmother, who would look in from time to time on these important occasions, caught him less diligently employed than a turnspit dog! It was a weary, hot, monotonous business, sure enough; but young John Hodge felt himself amply

rewarded with a sixpence and a good supper at the end of it.

The remanets of a roast hare lend themselves, I need hardly say, most admirably for conversion into hash, a dish much to be commended and eaten. My friend, the steward of Gray's Inn, a thorough all-round sportsman, tells me that, to eat a roast hare in perfection, it should not be skinned, but the hair singed or scalded off. I have not experimented in this line, but the suggestion seems reasonable, and perhaps we shall have to say "first catch your hare, then *don't* skin it." To fillet a hare strikes me as a waste, though, of course, not so extravagant as sacrificing a peacock for its brains *more Romanorum*. To pot hare is to spoil a good thing, and so it is to make a pie of it; though the latter is lawful when you are compounding a raised pie of all sorts of game. I now come to hare jugged. This, I humbly submit, is the best culinary method of all of dealing with pussey. Hashed hare, good reader, if haply you are at all in a haze about this matter, is not jugged hare. Jugged hare is hare done literally in a jug or jar with a loose cover on it. The hare is cut up scientifically into junks or joints, and packed loosely in the "jug." Add a small bunch of sweet herbs, an onion porcupined with cloves, a dash of

mace, a glass of port wine, and just cover the whole contents with water or stock gravy. Put in a slow oven and stew gently three or four hours. When served (hot as possible) a little sauce of some kind may be added to taste, but not much of it, and a few forcemeat balls. I pity the man, and woman too, who cannot make a good dinner off jugged hare. In no other method of cooking is the full leporine flavour and odour more thoroughly conserved.

It has long been held that the flesh of a hunted hare is much more tender than that of one which has been shot. Certainly, if both are eaten at the same interval after death. A shot hare can hardly be eaten before it has been hanged a week, but a hunted hare is as tender as you could wish it to be on the very day of its death. The reason is that a hunted hare has been violently using for a considerable time the muscles of its legs, and, consequently, those of its back; the back has become surcharged with blood, and when it dies the *rigor mortis* sets in immediately, and as subcutaneous ecchymoses have been formed, decomposition commences very quickly. In a minor degree this takes place when a hare has been killed by greyhounds after a short or moderate course. In the case of a shot hare it dies after compara-

tively no exhaustion, and so decomposition, or the process of becoming tender, is delayed.

A hare when first started before a pack of hounds runs, as it is said, "belly to earth," that is with its legs so stretched out that the belly almost touches the ground, and the print of the whole foot is left on soft soil; but after a time the animal, as it were, grows shorter and taller by the stiffening of the legs and the arching of the back, and at length only the extremities of the feet touch the ground. After a long run, either in coursing or hunting, a hare which, at the last moment, may have happened to escape the dogs, will often be found dead from the stiffness caused by the exertion it has gone through. It is well known that in all sickly animals putrefaction rapidly sets in after they have been killed; and Dr. Fournol, who has made his observations the subject of a communication to the Paris Academy of Science, says that a state of exhaustion at the time of killing is extremely favourable to early decomposition. This fact may account for the old practice of whipping sucking pigs as a preliminary to killing, and of the French custom of running down *old* fowls with a view to making them tender.

Here I will conclude this long yarn about hares, merely

observing that after their poor bodies are eaten their skins serve many purposes. Their feet are used by painters, their ears and scuts by naturalists in smoothing the feathers of stuffed birds, and the fur from various parts of their bodies by artificial fly makers. It is hardly possible to name a more useful animal all round than *Lepus timidus.*

RABBITS.

RABBITS.

LIKE the "merry brown hares," Rabbits do not come within the strict category of game according to law, but they fill no mean part in the economy of the sportsman's life, and are always welcome among the spoils of war. When the shooting season proper has come to an end with the last day of January, and partridges are left to pair, like other respectable birds, on St. Valentine's Day, and pheasants to carry out their own Mormonistic arrangements, there is some fun still to be had for another fortnight or more with the ubiquitous and irrepressible rabbit, which affords no mean sport, though some sportsmen, having had their fill of amusement in the pursuit of a nobler quarry, affect to despise it. Abuse the conies as you will as "feeble folk," and draw your indictment against them as destructive vermin as long as you like,

still they are useful and acceptable little animals from many points of view. They are useful, for instance, in pheasant preserves, as foxes will always take a rabbit in preference to a pheasant for a meal, and therefore, wise keepers, who are instructed, as they should be, to have pheasants for their masters and foxes for the hunt in the same covers, will place dead rabbits near the earth for the cubs, to encourage a natural taste for them, and will even cater for the old foxes in the same way. Acceptable, too, are the rabbits to those who wish, as many do, to prolong the shooting season, and a day with them in the woods and furze brakes on the rough bracken-covered commons, in the copses and spinnies, or along the hedgerows, with the chance of an occasional woodcock being flushed and bagged, affords genuine and enjoyable sport. And just when the game shooting is over there is no better time for thinning down the surplus rabbit population, which is apt to play havoc with the young wheat, and to cause angry thoughts to rise in the hearts of the tenant-farmers. This is the time, too, consequently, especially on all farms where fur and feather are reserved, to appease the wrath of the aforesaid tenants by giving them plenty of opportunities, with their sons and friends, to explode their wrath and their guns against the furry

offenders, and thus to bring the shooting season to a close with plenty of firing and good feeling.

But before proceeding further with my subject, I must, as in previous jottings on grouse, partridge, &c., make a few remarks on the natural history of our little friend, and the etymology of his name. The Rabbit belongs to the Hare or Leporidæ Family, which is composed only of himself, *Lepus cuniculus*, and the hare, *Lepus timidus*. The word *Cuniculus*, from the Greek *Κύνικλος* or *Κόνικλος*, signifies a rabbit or a subterranean passage, a mine or burrow, and it is evident that the animal, from its habit of burrowing, was called by this title. Addison, "On Ancient Medals," says: "There are learned medallists that tell us that the rabbit which you see before her feet [Spain] may signify either the great multitude of these animals that are found in Spain, or perhaps the several mines that are wrought within the bowels of the earth of that country, the Latin word *cuniculus* signifying either a rabbit or a mine." We find the word in several languages: For instance, *conil* in old French, *conejo* in Spanish, and *kanin* and *kunele* in German. Our form of the word is "cony," but at the same time it must be remembered that the "cony" of Scripture is not our rabbit. The Biblical "cony" is really the Syrian *hyrax*

(Hebrew *shaphan),* a creature which is not even a rodent, but, though small it be, to be classed with the elephant, rhinoceros, and the hippopotamus. There are several varieties of it, but that best known is the South African species, *Hyrax capensis* familiarly called the "rock rabbit," though in reality not being a rabbit at all. No *true* rabbit has ever been discovered in Palestine. From the presumedly simple mind of the rabbit we find the old English words "coney-catcher," a thief or sharper, and "coney-catch," to trick or deceive. "Marry," says a character in Ben Johnson's "Staple of Newes," "I woud ha' the old *conicatcher* coozened of all he has," and in Shakespeare we read, "Take heed, Signor Baptista, lest you be *cony-catched* in this business." Our word "rabbit" probably comes from the Latin *rapidus* (rapid), and was given to the little animal because of his quick, agile movements. It was originally written "robbet," and we find it in the Dutch *robbe, robbeken.*

The habits and method of life of our common wild rabbits are so well known that it would be out of place for me to attempt to inflict any long account of them on my readers. Their chief characteristic is their prolificness, which is proverbial. They breed and multiply as no other living creature, except, possibly, the herring or the

Pulex orientalis, being actuated by no Malthusian principles. Daniel, in his "Rural Sports," says that they breed at six weeks, bear seven times annually, and produce five young ones each time. He is more than within the mark in all these particulars; and the calculation of the produce of a pair of rabbits, including their grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-great, &c., is something astonishing. We have all heard of the marvellous manner in which they have increased in the Australian colonies since they were introduced, the climate and grasses at the Antipodes being peculiarly favourable to the multiplication and development of the Leporidæ Family. In many districts they have become a positive nuisance, almost a plague, like locusts elsewhere, and "Rabbit Suppression Bills" have been already passed in some provinces for the protection of the colonists. The "Shire Councils" are empowered to go on private property to destroy them, and all means, fair and foul, are allowed for their destruction, while a heavy fine is imposed on anyone who turns rabbits out loose.

It is with the greatest difficulty that ordinary wild rabbits can be domesticated. They pine away when kept in hutches, even though they be obtained for the experiment when quite young. While mentioning this

fact, it may not be out of place briefly to record a remarkable instance of the tameness and strange ways of a domestic rabbit of a common breed which belonged to my children a few years ago. "Lord de Grey," for so we called him, was about a year old when I bought him, in the spring, at Leadenhall Market, and he very soon evinced a marked desire to be on the most amicable terms with all of us, and especially with my wife. He would always come to the name of "Bunny," and jump on her lap, and, if allowed, go to sleep there; and frequently he would perch upon her shoulder and lick her face. His great delight was to get on the table after a meal, and, steering clear of the different things on it, pick up all kinds of odds and ends of comestibles. Nothing seemed to come amiss to him, and nothing to disagree with him. He would eat any kind of pudding, and jam tart was a special favourite with him; and he would drink beer and gravy. He had no fear of any of us, and evidently liked being handled. Nor were cats a terror to him; indeed, he was rather a terror to them, for he would chase stray ones out of our back garden. When the winter came on, and, as usual, we parted with our colony of rabbits, we made a present of "Lord de Grey" to our poulterer at Bayswater, who promised not to convert him into rabbit

meat. He made great friends with his new owner and his family, and had the run of the shop like a dog, while a great portion of his time was devoted to playing with a cat and her kittens. He used to run in and out of the shop, and pay visits to neighbouring ones. On one of these expeditions, I fear he was picked up, as he disappeared, and no tidings were heard of him afterwards. I have often regretted that I parted with him, as I feel sure that with a little trouble he might have been taught many amusing tricks.

The question has often been raised as to whether there is such a thing as a cross between the hare and rabbit. So nearly allied are they that such a cross might naturally be expected. But naturalists seem pretty well agreed that there are no well authenticated instances of such hybrids; certainly not between the common English hare and rabbit. A cross between the Scotch or blue hare and a rabbit would, *primâ facie*, be more likely than one between an English hare and rabbit, for the blue hare partakes more of the character of the rabbit; and yet such a cross does not seem to be satisfactorily proved, though some French naturalists hold that several so-called "Leporines" are instances of it. Several specimens of alleged crosses have, from time to time,

been submitted to Mr. Buckland, and other English naturalists, but I believe that in all cases these authorities have come to the conclusion that they were nothing but rabbits.

It is, or perhaps I should say, it used to be, held that there were four kinds of wild rabbits, called Warreners, Parkers, Hedgehogs, and Sweethearts. Of the meaning and application of the last term, as applied to rabbits, I must confess my ignorance. The warreners were the animals which, as their name suggests, tenanted the rabbinitical Edens called warrens, especially those on our coasts. The rabbits of the English warrens are larger in size than, and said to be superior in flavour to, those of the Scotch and Irish. The richest and finest warren rabbits are found in the warrens of our eastern coast, extending from Lincolnshire to Berwick-on-Tweed, and they are larger than the rabbits of the west coast of our island: and I have seen it stated that the latter have in many places a decidedly fishy taste. The parker and the hedgehog rabbit have been described as "very much alike," frequenting plantations and high inland rocky ground, uniformly smaller than the warren rabbits of the eastern coast of England, but "nearly of the same length and weight as the general run of Scotch and Irish

rabbits." But really these are "distinctions without differences." It cannot be truly said that these are "distinct varieties" of our wild rabbit, though food will cause a *temporary* difference. It has been found by experiment that warren rabbits removed to a covert, and allowed to breed there, soon assume the same type as the prior inhabitants of the locality.

Our wild rabbits are pretty, intelligent little creatures, of quick perception, and up to innumerable dodges. There are few more interesting sights than the gambols and frolics of these "nimble-skipping little animals" on a summer's evening, when they congregate just outside a covert to nibble the grass in an adjoining meadow, or to disport themselves in company. If you conceal yourself at the edge of the covert and patiently wait till the alarm caused by your getting into position has subsided, you may watch their antics at leisure, and if your heart is not softened too much by the happy play of the little innocents, you may amuse yourself by taking an occasional shot at them with an air-gun.

Decidedly the best form of rabbit shooting is with half a dozen to a dozen guns in coverts, and a pack of dogs to "roust" the bunnies about. It is a good plan to ferret the chief burrows and stop as many holes as you can the

day before or early on the morning of the shooting. But this does not matter so much in February and March, especially if the weather is mild, for then the rabbits are naturally inclined to "sit out" rather than stay at home in their holes. Still, it is well to stop as many holes as possible, for when once a rabbit has reached a burrow it is hardly necessary to say he will not leave it again while the shooting continues. Of course, the proper dogs for hunting the rabbits about are the true rabbit beagles, exquisite little hounds, rare facers of all obstacles, whether furze, thicket, bramble, or fence, never tired, free throwers of their tongues, and charmingly musical. A day's rabbiting is worth joining in, if only to witness these intelligent hounds do their work. But we must more often than not be content with a miscellaneous and improvised pack for our day's sport. The keeper's terriers, of course, are to the fore; there will be a sprinkling of spaniels, an old retriever, perhaps, or setter or two thrown in, and sometimes the shepherd's dog, who insists on joining in the fun. In fact, generally speaking, the pack is a "mixed lot"—

> Both mongrel, puppy, whelp, and hound,
> And curs of low degree

are there; and for all practical purposes they answer the

object in hand. The more dogs you have, however, which hunt by scent and not by sight the better. A dog that hunts with his eyes, though he may occasionally secure a rabbit for himself, is not of great use for hunting out rabbits to the gun where the covert is at all thick; and it often happens that the astute cony with a dog in hot pursuit will squat, let the dog run over him, and then turn back in an opposite direction. If you are wise, you will not use your regular springers or cockers for hunting rabbits, as this, more or less, spoils them for pheasant and cock. The guns are stationed sporadically to command the drives and runs, and the covert is worked methodically, if possible; but more often than not they are distributed without much order, each selecting, at a fair distance from his neighbour, some fairly open ground, a likely hollow, or commanding knoll; and, with the dogs let loose, the excitement commences to the heterogeneous music of the pack. Bow-yow-ow-ow-ow, &c., is heard in all sorts of keys and in every direction, as the pack is soon split up and each member is hunting on his own hook. The canine music, or discord, as you like to call it, rises and falls in irregular cadences, sometimes drawing near and sometimes receding from the spot where you are stationed, as the poor bunnies are pressed this way or that by their

relentless pursuers. You must be patient and observant of eye and ear. Now a bright-eyed timid *cuniculus*, though not immediately tracked, is on foot, having left his seat in fear, and in hope, too, of withdrawing safely from the hubbub he hears in proximity to him; he lops along gradually, pricking his ears; and now he stops within gunshot of you, though often he does not observe you. He is what is called in the vernacular of the art of rabbiting "a listener," and it remains with you to decide whether you shall take a cool pot-shot at him and score one. Now, while you are making up your mind, he is off, to be seen, or at least identified, no more; and another, with the dreaded yow-ow-ow behind him, is dashing by like lightning within fair distance. Have at him—"he who hesitates is lost;" in a moment you may not have the chance, or only a bad one.

Rare good fun, too, is shooting on a well-administered gorse common, which is divided with rides and drives intersecting each other at properly arranged distances. These straight lines of open space, bright with their smooth turf or glittering with frozen snow, give you fair chances as the dogs bustle the rabbits across them. But you must be very quick, as they do not often stop on these to "listen," but dash across them like

"greased lightning;" and a gorse common rabbit has the credit of travelling faster than those which frequent ordinary coverts.

Hedgerow rabbits may be worked with a couple of dogs and one gun, or, at the most, two on each side the hedge; but the dogs, whatever may be their breed, should be accustomed to the business, and know that it is no use for them to work out of gunshot. For this kind of shooting, too, as many holes as possible should be stopped in the morning before the sport begins. If you have meadows with rough "tussocky" grass and rills in them bordering on the hedges, frequented by rabbits, you will find your quarry sitting out a good deal in the early spring, especially on warm sunny days. You then require a dog which will hunt very close to you; but you may generally do pretty well by kicking them up with your feet. They at once make for their homes in the hedge bank and afford fair and pretty shots as they try to reach them at full speed.

Ferreting is an old established and well recognised method of rabbiting, but it is not to be compared with shooting to beagles, or a miscellaneous pack of dogs. It is, in fact, the least lively kind of rabbiting, and very uncertain. However, it is good amusement enough for

an "off" day, when you have nothing better to do, and especially when the snow is lying on the ground, and the day is frosty and bright. It is a *sine quâ non* that it be a quiet day. If there is much wind or wet the rabbits can hardly be got to "bolt" at all, or at least very sparingly. So obstinate are they at times that they will allow the ferrets to scratch their eyes out and gnaw to their very backbones before moving. Hence some persons muzzle their ferrets; but it is a question whether they work so well when thus treated. But let us suppose a bright, frosty, still morning, with the snow crisp beneath your feet, when, as Keats sings in his "Eve of St. Agnes," "the hare goes limping o'er the frozen ground," while the partridges, tamed by scanty fare, come cowering under the corn ricks like barn door chickens, and the bunnies, happy and brisk as ever, are making themselves snug in the recesses of their burrows. The keeper, or your "jack-of-all-trades," or some local ratcatcher, whom you have engaged for the nonce, is at the door with his boxes or bags of red-eyed ferrets, which, as he handles them, wriggle about like eels; also the boy with the peg-nets, as perhaps you want a few live rabbits for turning down elsewhere, and another with a couple of spades for digging out ferrets which persist in "laying up" after

having pinned some unfortunate bunny in a *cul de sac.* All is in readiness, and you sally forth with your *posse comitatus*, and a steady and dependable retriever at your heels.

Now, to ferret a large burrow in a wood or quarry or big bank, and pot the unfortunate rabbits as they quietly steal out of one hole to get into another, is no fun at all; the only ferreting worthy of the name of sport is that conducted along the hedgerows. A gun at each side is enough, with an additional one, if you like, to "wipe your eye," and if you have two guns at each side, then it is a good plan to arrange for each to fire first alternately. Stand close to the hedge, about ten or fifteen yards from where the ferrets are put in, with attendant man and boys behind you, and then "attention" is the word of command. No talking and no stamping of your feet on the ground, or buffeting of your hands, even though your fingers and toes be so cold that you cannot feel them. As when the "pious" Æneas was about to tell the long story of his woes—

Conticuere omnes, intentique ora tenebant—

so it must be now. If a rabbit comes to the mouth of a hole, and sees a man or dog anywhere near, or hears a human or canine voice, it is ten to one he will retreat,

and determine to face "the ills he has" in the way of a ferret at his scut or at some more vulnerable part of his anatomy, than "fly to others he knows not of," or, perhaps more strictly speaking, that he does know of. But if all is quiet, and there is nothing to create suspicion, he very naturally thinks that the best thing to do is to make a bolt of it, and trust to the chapter of accidents. If you are quiet, you will, even at ten or fifteen yards' distance, have some notice of his intention to bolt; for you will hear dull, spasmodic subterranean sounds, which gradually grow into a continuous rumble, resembling a miniature earthquake; the snow heaves, and the earth, as it were, opens, and out shoots Master "Rabbi" from a bolting hole under a hanging bough or big root—a hole whose existence you never suspected, intimately as you fancied you knew the ground. If there is an open, clear ditch on one side of the hedgerow, and the rabbit scuttles away right down it at his best pace, you must be a decent shot to stop him. Nothing is more easily missed than a rabbit under such circumstances, and, consequently, where you do knock over the speedy fugitive, and the impetus on him causes him to turn head over heels two or three times in succession with almost mathematical precision, the performance is an eminently satisfactory one—at

least to the man behind the gun. Your retriever, who has been waiting modestly in the background in an attitude of intense observation, with his head cocked slightly on one side, dashes forward to bring back the limp bag of fur, and if you are in a good humour you will pardon the irrepressible terrier whom you have brought with you merely to tell you by his scratchings whether poor bunny is at home at each particular hole, when he, too, rushes headlong to assist the retriever and even dispute the prize with him. He has behaved fairly well hitherto, but now the excitement of the moment has got the better of him. Be merciful to him; his human superiors not seldomly err in the same line.

But, oh! the tediousness and worry of a day's ferreting where the rabbits won't bolt and the ferrets will lie up—when time is wasted, patience exhausted, and bad temper engendered. The lying-up of a ferret is the worst business of all. There is the long wearisome waiting till his ferretship designs to make his re-appearance, or the digging him out, which is often as long and wearisome a process, and sometimes owing to big stones or roots of trees next to impossible. In the deep recesses of a big bank he has firmly fixed himself on his prey, on which he will make a hearty meal, and then curl himself up for a

hearty snooze beyond reach of the spade and excavating operations, and, perhaps if you detach one of the party to mount guard, while the rest go on to the next hole or holes, you may then again meet with a repetition of the annoyance. Sometimes you can get the rabbit out by the aid of a long stout briar, which you twist into his fur till you feel it take a hold, and your ferret will come with it as you gradually and gently haul away; but more often than not the burrow twists and turns too much for the operation, or the spot you wish to reach is too far off. I have heard it said that when a ferret lays up, if you rip open the belly of a newly-killed rabbit, and push it a little way into the hole on the windward side of the burrow, the fumes of the warm entrails are irresistible to the ferret, and will draw it as if by magic to the scent. I have never tried the experiment, and therefore perhaps I have no right to doubt its success; but I do, for I cannot conceive why a ferret should leave one really hot rabbit for another to some extent cold. To avoid one special provocation to ferrets to lay up, namely, the presence of young ones in the burrows, you should give up ferreting by the end of February. About the beginning of March the young ones generally commence to make their appearance; and no ferret can be expected

to do his work properly with a lot of very young rabbits here and there in the burrow, which are generally so paralysed with fear that they become motionless, the moment the ferret makes his appearance.

While speaking of ferrets, let me be allowed to put in a plea on their behalf, and crave a little more kindness in their keeping. Few animals are so utterly and cruelly neglected as ferrets, that is, as a general rule, both as regards their quarters and their food. Most persons seem to think that anything is good enough for the poor wretches, putrid meat or filthy offal, while any box, hardly worth the name of a hutch, will do for them to live in. This is a great mistake, and the result is that ferrets suffer from chronic diseases and die off in numbers. They should have milk and bread every day, with an occasional bird or piece of fresh meat, and clean water always at hand; and their house should have a yard to it. They are naturally cleanly animals, and will never soil their sleeping apartment, which by the way should have clean hay in it, if they have a court or yard attached. This yard should be cleaned, sanded, and have a little lime dusted over it every morning; and when ferrets are not worked they should have a run occasionally in a field. If these matters were attended to we should not

hear so much as we do of footrot and other ferret ailments, and the little animals would be in better fettle for work.

And now a few jottings as to the act of shooting the rabbit. Let no one suppose (and probably no one who has had experience does so) that our little friend is easy to knock over. Quite the contrary. Of course a "listener" can be potted by any tyro, as also one which, unconscious of your presence just "loppits" along like a hare taking things easily; but not so the scared little fellow which darts across a ride or narrow pathway in the wood, or scampers from one bush to another, or rushes helter-skettle down the open ditch by the hedge side, or whom you kick up out of a tuft of rough grass or rills within fifty yards of his burrow in the bank. Under these circumstances he is more nimble than a hare or greyhound for a short distance, and nothing is more easy than to miss him. Many a good hand on the grouse moor or in the partridge field, or who can account for most "rocketing" pheasants within fair reach, is often nonplussed by the agile and subtle *Lepus cuniculus*, who seems to know instinctively how best to dodge to its own advantage. Men who will kill nine out of ten partridges within forty yards will often miss half the rabbits they

shoot at in a day. They are essentially dodging animals. Somerville, in *The Chase*, speaks of them as "dodging conies;" and another writer dilates on their "bouncing and stotting movements"—"stotting" being an old Northumbrian word, signifying rebounding. A good rabbit shot is a high wrangler among sportsmen, and I need hardly say that the great secret of success is shooting well ahead. When scuttling down a ditch or running straight away from you your aim must be well over his head; indeed, you should see a clear space between his head and the mark to which your barrel points, and when running at anything like a right angle to you, you should aim just in front of his nose. How easy to say all this; but how hard to practise it! Not allowing sufficiently for the pace at which our game is flying or running, or, in other words, not shooting enough in advance, is the rock on which the majority of sportsmen become shipwreck. Rabbits will carry away an immense deal of shot in their hind quarters, and so tenacious of life are they, and so strong in their desire to get into their holes when wounded, that in their very death struggles they will drag their crippled frames a considerable distance. Warreners tell us that if a wounded and dying rabbit gets into a hole, no living ones will ever pass;

they will die first: and thus only half killing a rabbit may cause the death of a score or more in a warren. Moreover, if you kill a rabbit by shooting him in the hind quarters, you spoil him more or less for table. In cover shooting you often have to pull trigger more by faith than sight, as a momentary glimpse of your quarry is frequently all that is vouchsafed you. This is how Watt —even the humble sport of rabbit shooting has its poet —puts it:

> More difficult than hares to hit,
> They frequently appear to flit
> Like shadows past one—good indeed
> Is then the aim which bids them bleed.
> If you would see them nicely stopped
> In the thick wood, you must adopt
> Snap shooting, for you'll seldom there
> Have time to take them full and fair;
> E'en lost to view advance your gun
> Quickly to where you think they run;
> Regard not grass, nor bush, nor briar,
> Through each and all that instant fire.
> Bang! it's well—you saw him not
> And yet you've killed him on the spot.

A light short gun is best for the sport in cover, and I think the best sized shot is No. 5. The thick fur coat of a rabbit offers a strong resistance to shot, and unless he hits it in a vital part a good shot can make no certainty of a rabbit much over thirty-five yards. It

has been said with truth that rabbits are harder to kill in the snow than at other times. Whether it is that the snow dazzles their weak eyes, or that they are over excited by the bright and brisk state of the atmosphere, I cannot say; but certainly they have a way of jumping and bounding and doubling at such times that specially puzzles the gun, and to make matters worse, their quick doubling movement often raises quite a cloud of sparkling snow spray. Altogether rabbit-shooting is good practice, if it does not get you too much into the habit of snap-shooting. It is as bad to give oneself up to snap-shooting as not to be able to take a snap-shot at all.

And now I cannot refrain from adding a few remarks on the caution which a sportsman should exercise in rabbit shooting. An incident once befel me in my early days which I shall never forget. A friend and myself were working a hedgerow with a couple of terriers; the hedge was thick, and I saw a rabbit working about thirty yards ahead of me on the top of the hedge bank, which happened to be a little lower than the spot where I was; with boyish thoughtlessness I fired; my friend raised a shout, and I fully thought I had fatally wounded him. It was some relief to find that it was only his retriever I had hit—and hit mortally; but he was only a couple of yards

behind the dog, and so had a painfully narrow escape. I learnt a lesson which I have never forgotten. How many deplorable accidents have happened through the indiscretion and over-eagerness of young (and old) rabbit shooters within the last few years I cannot say, but they make up a large total; while the narrow escapes must be almost innumerable. To take the life or even seriously injure a companion out shooting is almost the saddest event which can happen to one, and fraught with bitter memories to the end of one's days. Under no possible circumstances should a sportsman fire towards a hedge or even low towards the hedge bank. Let this be a golden rule. However fair be the chance offered, and though you may feel absolutely certain that nothing living is at the other side, still observe the rule under all circumstances. For the sake of a paltry rabbit or a bird, do not risk even the one chance in a thousand of killing, maiming, or blinding for life a human being, or even a horse, a cow, or worthless dog on the other side. If you go out shooting with young fellows, let them fully understand, before the work begins, that if the golden rule is broken, either you or they leave the field at once; and in the case of a boy who is just trying his "'prentice hand," take his gun away, give him a good box on the ears,

and send him home in disgrace, with the understanding that he shall not handle a gun again for the season.

Gastronomically, the rabbit is by no means to be despised, as he lends himself to almost as many ways of being treated by the mageiric art as French cooks can deal with an egg. The French, as a rule, do not seem to esteem rabbit flesh very highly, and, I believe, recoil from that of the large mixed breed of animals, which they raise in such large quantities for the English market, with nearly as much horror as a Scotch Highlander does from eels. But on the continent generally the real wild rabbit is valued more highly than among ourselves. Great cooks like Alexis Soyer and Fin Bec maintain that the flesh of a rabbit is better and more fragrant for culinary purposes than that of the chicken. "What is a rabbit?" mysteriously asks Fin Bec in his delightful "Epicure's Year Book" for 1868, a volume of which the suggestive motto is that "Nothing should mar the sober majesties of settled, sweet, Epicurean life." Miss Acton estimates rabbits as game; Mrs. Beeton regards them as poultry; Alexis Soyer reviews their culinary treatment under the head of fowls. Rabbits are not often served whole at the table of Dives, but boiled or roast and smothered in onions they have long been a special

luxury for Lazarus. In one sense they are eaten by the rich and poor alike; for the "white soups," and "mulligatawney" of the West End, no less than the Sunday pie of Whitechapel, and the least aristocratic parts of South London, owe their ingredients to our "nimble-skipping little animal;" and one of the greatest landed proprietors of the North of England has described the nature of his sway over his poorer tenants and cottagers as "a mild despotism tempered with rabbits." By the way, how strange it is that the ordinary female domestic servant of the period disdains rabbits (and hares, too, for the matter of that). Can it be that she thinks that by so doing she will be credited with having a taste which indicates that her parentage is higher than generally supposed? Or, is she influenced by the Levitical law which makes the leporid family unclean, or by a tradition handed down from our British forefathers, who also declined the flesh of rabbits? Cæsar, in his "De Bello Gallico," lib. 5, cap. xii., says: "The inland parts of Britain are inhabited by those whom fame reports to be natives of the soil. They think it unlawful to feed upon *hares*, pullets, or geese; yet they breed them up for their diversion and pleasure." These domestic *hares*, however, there can be little doubt, were large fancy

rabbits. We have certainly got over any repugnance which we might once have entertained for "pullets" and "geese," but among the upper classes the domestic fancy rabbit, though it may be fattened up to an excellent animal for the table, is hardly ever eaten by them, and the "Ostend" rabbit, under the idea that it is a "tame" species, is equally rejected. In olden days, it is said, so prevalent was a dish of rabbit in some form or other, when salmon and other fish were equally plentiful, that in some country districts servants stipulated with the masters not to have rabbit or fish for dinner oftener than three days a week; and as a proof that it is possible to have too much of a good thing, the grace said by an old doctor, who had been regaled rather too often on coney meat, may be cited—

> Of rabbits hot, and rabbits cold,
> Of rabbits young, and rabbits old,
> Of rabbits tender, and rabbits tough,
> I thank the Lord, I've had enough.

But to pass on. As I am not writing a chapter for a cookery book, I shall not attempt to give or dilate upon the various recipes for the treatment of the wild rabbit. As a general rule, it may be laid down that whatever you can do with a fowl you can do with a rabbit. Boiled rabbit (of course, with onion sauce galore), pulled rabbit,

stewed rabbit, and fricasseed rabbit are all excellent dishes; but commend me to a *roasted* rabbit. I have italicised "roasted," because "down south" we seldom roast a rabbit, and thus deny ourselves the best way of serving him. I do not mean that any rabbit you may kill or buy at a shop is good for roasting; for that purpose the animal must be *young,* and nearly full grown, and June and July are the months for him. Make a stuffing of fat bacon cut up small, the liver and a little suet chopped fine, some bread crumbs, sweet herbs, parsley, pepper and salt, and with this fill the rabbit; sew up neatly, and roast in front of an open fire, larding it well and basting continuously; eat with boiled or fried bacon and bread sauce, and I think you will allow that it is an excellent substitute for a young partridge, to which it has a great similarity in taste. In the north of England they very commonly roast rabbits or "pop them in the oven." Gamekeepers' wives are generally adepts at rabbit cooking in various ways, just as Thames fishermen's wives are at dealing with fresh-water fish. (N.B.—Don't eat rabbits after the middle of March; they are getting rank then, just as wild fowls are then losing their flavour; and let *gourmets* note that the flesh of a winter rabbit is best during a hard frost.) I have been told by a friend inter-

ested in such matters that the flavour of rabbits varies according to the soil on which they dwell, but I cannot undertake to endorse this statement. It is, however, but natural that it should vary somewhat according to the nature of the food they eat, and I think there is some truth in the old saying that "the shorter the grass the fatter the rabbit," perhaps also "the sweeter." By the way, in an old book, called the "Country Magazine," dated 1763, and "containing everything necessary for the advantage and pleasures of a country life" (which I bought for a few pence the other day at an old bookstall), I have come across a recipe anent rabbit cooking, which recommends boiling sausages with the rabbits, and, for sauce, melted butter with mustard. A Sussex friend, who by the way, says that young rabbits in that county when first leaving the maternal holes, are called "starters," assures me that the best way of dealing with a *young* rabbit is to disjoint him and fry the *disjecta membra* in egg and bread crumbs with a few mushrooms.

It is much to be regretted that of late years wild rabbits have risen enormously in price. About fifteen or twenty years ago they could be got, especially in the neighbourhood of warrens, at 6d. to 9d. each. They are now double the price, and often more; and thus they are dear food

for the poor. But out of evil may come good, and perhaps the demand for rabbits even at their present price may lead to the extension of rabbit "farming," which has been so often advocated of late. Towards the close of the last century Arthur Young entered into an elaborate computation to prove that a rabbit warren properly conducted was a more lucrative speculation than agriculture could be to a most successful farmer. He traced the history and gave the statistics of a famous Scotch warren, and showed that it returned 29 per cent. per annum to its proprietor. I believe that many warrens now are equally lucrative. Of course no one wishes to see a large stock of rabbits on cultivated land; they do not pay there, as they more than eat their heads off, and they are the cause of more ill-will and lawsuits among landlords, tenants, and renters of shooting than anything else. But there are thousands and tens of thousands of acres of waste land, which, notwithstanding the foolish ravings of agrarian agitators "of the baser sort," are incapable of cultivation, along our coasts and inland, admirably adapted for rabbit farms. Mr. Grantley Berkeley says we eat 30,000 tons of rabbit food per annum in this country, and, if I remember rightly, Lord Malmesbury, in a debate in the House of Lords some few

years ago, put the calculation higher than this, reckoning that thirty million rabbits, *i.e.,* nearly one per head of the population of England, Scotland, and Wales, were annually consumed by us. With rabbits at half, or, say, two-thirds, their present price, the demand would increase enormously, and there would be ample profit for rabbit farmers. I wish someone would seriously take this matter up as a branch of the national food supply question; and I am convinced that a Rabbit Farming Company, starting with sufficient capital, might be made one of the most lucrative ventures of modern days. I should like also to see the experiment of mixing some of our tame rabbits with the warreners more largely tried. The prolificness of our wild rabbits would not, I think, be diminished, while we should gain in size. Those who eat "Ostend" rabbits now would eat our own Ostenders. At the same time, warrens for pure wild rabbits should be maintained and developed. By the way, the "tinned" rabbits from various parts of Australia are by no means bad food. The best brands are to be got from Mr. John M'Call, of 137, Houndsditch, E., and those who have not experimented on them will do well to do so.

Space fails me to say much on the subject of rabbit law, which, unfortunately, is still somewhat hazy, not-

withstanding the many decisions which have been given in our courts of law. In olden days rabbiting was a much esteemed sport in its various branches; and in the reign of James I. he who would indulge in it had to prove his possession of hereditaments of the yearly value of £40, or to be worth £200 in goods, or have an inclosed warren worth 40s. a year. "In good King Charlie's merry days, when loyalty no harm meant," severe laws were enacted for the protection of the rabbit; and in the reign of George I. rabbit poaching was a felony, to be dealt with "without benefit of clergy." The law now in reference to rabbits—as, indeed, to many matters connected with our field sports—seems in a state of confusion; and certainly *Lepus cuniculus* has fallen from his high estate, being looked upon as little better than "vermin." He gets some protection, however, under the Trespass Acts, and it would be a matter of regret if he were altogether outlawed. From a national point of view, in connection with his contributions to our food supply, and affording many a pleasant day's sport, we cannot yet afford to lose our humble little rabbit; what, however, will ultimately become of our Leporidæ in these happy islands remains to be seen. As I was concluding these Leporidal jottings the "Hares and Rabbit

Bill," introduced by the Home Secretary to the new Liberal Government of 1880, was being discussed. Let us hope that, whatever measures are ultimately decided upon, they will take such a reasonable form that they will not involve the extinction of all "fur." The Government Bill, as drafted and proposed to the House of Commons in May, 1880, hardly satisfied any party, either in or out of the House. If it were carried in its original form, it needs no great power of prophecy to predict that it would cause more ill-feeling than do all the rest of the Game Laws now existing. To say nothing of its proposed interference with the "rights of contract" in giving an "inalienable right" to tenants to destroy all ground game, it would set class against class, and turn many a peaceful village into a very land of discord. It was said that a large landed proprietor in Yorkshire had determined, in the event of the Bill passing, to exercise *his* right, and at once put on a regiment of men to destroy all hares and rabbits on his tenants' holdings; and having thus freed the occupiers of the so-called "intolerable nuisance," he would proceed to recoup himself for the loss of his pleasure of shooting by raising the rents ten per cent. This, of course, might have been a mere threat, but it is

an evidence of the feeling that was stirred up by the proposal of the Government. Perhaps a way may be found of getting out of the difficulty; but as matters now stand the sport of shooting generally in this country is threatened, and hares and rabbits particularly singled out for destruction.

QUAILS.

QUAILS.

THOUGH Quails are to some extent protected by our Game Laws, they are not generally recognised as game in the ordinary acceptation of the word. Still they are always prized by sportsmen, and in themselves are very interesting little birds.

The Quail is classed by naturalists in the Order of Gallinæ, and belongs to the Tetraonidæ or grouse family, and to the sub-family of *Perdicinæ*, which consists of it and the partridge. Its Latin name is *Coturnix*, and *Communis* is added to it to distinguish the common European quail from other varieties. It is called also *Perdix Coturnix;* and, from its migratory habits, the "Wandering" quail. Thus sings one of the poets:

> Whither away, O thou wandering quail?
> Whither away o'er the wide wild seas?
> Hear'st thou a voice from some Persian vale?
> Hear'st thou a call from the Cyclades?

The quail is certainly a very pretty and intelligent looking bird, and bears a strong resemblance to the partridge, though generally of lighter marking. It is plump and round bodied, with the head set closely on the shoulders, and in size it is a little larger than a blackbird or thrush. The wings are pressed closely to the body, and the tail is pointed, very short and directed downwards, so that it almost appears to be absent, and the bird seems to be more plump than really is the case. Plumpness, however, is its distinguishing feature, and hence the name by which the Arabs call it, *salwa* or *selaw*, which signifies plumpness or fatness. Biblical scholars have called attention to the fact that this word is almost exactly the Hebrew word *selâv*, which in our version is translated "quail" wherever it occurs, and they have no doubt that the common quail is the bird mentioned as supplying food to the Israelites in the desert. The Rev. J. G. Wood goes as far as to say that we need not look on the supply as specially miraculous, considering the numbers and habits of these birds.

Unlike their congeners, the partridges, quails are certainly polygamous. The nests of those which breed in this country are generally found among wheat, clover, or long grass, and are mere hollows in the ground, lined

with dry herbage of various kinds. The eggs, from seven to twelve in number, are white, tinged with a yellowish red, blotched or speckled with brown. The female sits upon them three weeks, and the young follow her as soon as they leave the shell, feeding at once on seeds, insects, and green herbage. As all sportsmen know, a brood of quails is called a "bevy."

We have all read in our ichthyological studies how eels are produced from short lengths of horsehair thrown in the water, and pike from the pickerel weed growing therein; but these are very simple operations of nature compared with the ornithological account given of the generation of quails by an antiquarian many years ago. He says:—"When there are great storms upon the coasts of Libya, the sea casts up great tunnies upon the shore, and these breed worms for fourteen days, by which they grow to be as big as flies; then as locusts; which, being augmented in bigness, become birds called quails." These interesting facts may be useful to the Darwinians!

But before proceeding further I must indulge, as is my wont, in a few etymological remarks. The word "quail" is found in different forms in several languages, *caille*, for instance, in the French, and *quaglia*, in Italian. It is said that the term was given to the bird "from the noise

it makes." The same is said of the origin of the Latin appellation *Coturnix* which is represented as another case of onomatopœia. I fail to recognise the appropriateness of this onomatopœia in either case, as the shrill piping note is generally represented by *verru-verru,* followed by *pee-voi-ree* several times repeated. But the cries and calls of animals sound very differently to different ears; and with this safe remark I must leave the matter. The ancient British name of the bird seems to have been "Sofliar." From Plautus we find that the Romans of this time used the word *Coturnix* as a term of endearment; but our ancestors many years ago seem to have employed the word "quail" to represent courtesans —"so called because the quail was thought to be a very amorous bird."

The home of the quail may be said to be the districts adjoining and the islands in the Mediterranean sea, through which they circulate, as it were, in their partial migrations. Their numbers at times in some parts are almost incredible, especially on the North Coast of Africa and in Egypt. Temminck tells us that on the coast of Naples 100,000 have been captured in a single day, and that within a comparatively limited space. Such large quantities used to be captured formerly in the Island of

Capri, near Naples, at the commencement of the autumn, that the Bishop derived from them the chief part of the revenue, and was called in consequence by the profane "The Bishop of Quails." Pliny tells us that they sometimes alighted on vessels in the Mediterranean in such prodigious numbers as to sink them. We certainly do not hear of such marine catastrophes in these days, but still there is no lack of quails in their old habitats.

The Rev. J. G. Wood, in his "Bible Animals," gives some interesting details of methods still employed in the East for capturing them. One very simple plan is for the hunters to select a spot on which the birds are assembled, and to ride or walk round them in a large circle, or rather in a constantly diminishing spiral. The birds are by this process driven closer and closer together, until at the last they are packed in such masses that a net can be thrown over them, and a great number captured in it. Sometimes a party of hunters unite to take the quails, and employ a similar manœuvre, except that, instead of merely walking round the quails, they approach simultaneously from opposite points, and then circle round them until the birds are supposed to be sufficiently packed. At a given signal they all converge upon the

terrified birds, and then take them by thousands at a time.

In Northern Africa these birds are captured in a very similar fashion. As soon as notice is given that a flight of quails has settled, all the men of the village turn out with their great burnouses or cloaks. Making choice of some spot as a centre, where a quantity of brushwood grows or is laid down, the men surround it on all sides, and move slowly towards it, spreading their cloaks in their outstretched hands, and flapping them like the wings of huge birds. Indeed, when a man is seen from a little distance performing this act he looks more like a huge bat than a human being. As the men gradually converge upon the brushwood, the quails naturally run towards it for shelter, and at last they all creep under the treacherous shade. Still holding their outspread cloaks in their extended hands, the hunters suddenly run to the brushwood, fling their cloaks over it, and so enclose the birds in a trap from which they cannot escape. Much care is required in this method of hunting, lest the birds should take to flight, and so escape. The circle is therefore made of very great size, and the men who compose it advance so slowly that the quails prefer to use their legs rather than their wings, and do not think of

flight until their enemies are so close upon them that their safest course appears to be to take refuge in the brushwood.

Boys catch quails in various traps and springes, the most ingenious of which is a kind of trap, the door of which overbalances itself by the weight of the bird.

By reason of the colour of the quail, and its inveterate habit of keeping close to the ground, it easily escapes observation, and even the most practised eye can scarcely distinguish a single bird, though there may be hundreds within a very small compass. Fortunately for the hunters, and unfortunately for itself, it betrays its presence by its shrill whistling note, which it frequently utters, and which is so peculiar that it will at once direct the hunter to his prey. This note is at the same time the call of the male to the female, and a challenge to its own sex. Hence the use of the quail-call, or quail-pipe, which we read of as employed many generations ago. In Chaucer we find the lines:

> And high shoes knopped with dagges,
> That frouncen like a *quail-pipe*.

Ray, on "The Creation," says: "Hen birds, for example, have a peculiar sort of voice when they would call the male, which is so eminent in quails, that it is taken

notice of by men, who, by counterfeiting this voice with a quail-pipe, easily draw the cocks into their snares." In Beaumont and Fletcher's "Humorous Lieutenant" we have another reference to these pipes:

CELIA: Master, my royal sir, do you hear who calls you? Love, my Demetrius!

LEONTIUS: These are pretty *quail-pipes*; the cock will crow anon.

A writer in the *Illustrated News,* some few years ago, remarking that the quails sold in London market were generally males, said: "The reason why they are so is simply this: the males, in flocks, precede by several days the arrival of the females, and, like sailors from a long voyage, meet with crimps ashore. Nets are prepared, the quail-pipe imitating the low note of the female is heard, the male utters his clear whistling trisyllable '*pee-voi-ree*' by way of answering; and in this manner scores at a time are drawn into the trap." And he adds, "The story has a moral, so it be read aright." Bishop Mant also speaks of the quail-pipe in the following lines:

Less likely of your aim to fail,
If with loud call the whistling quail
Attract you, 'mid the bladed wheat
To spread the skilful snare, and cheat
With mimick sounds his amorous ear,
Intent the female's cry to hear.

The habit of the quail, already alluded to, of lying

very close, seems long ago to have given rise to a kind of proverb, as we find Chaucer, in "The Clerk's Tale," using the expression "couche as doth a quaille." This habit troubles the sportsman at times, but it also involves the bird in difficulties, as a curious mode of its capture in Malta witnesses. In that island, during the months of April and May, when the quail are making their way northward from Africa to Europe, and in the month of September and October, when they are on their return journey, a great number of birds take a temporary rest, and a couple of guns can often bag as many as twenty brace in a day. It frequently happens when the dogs, called "smell-dogs," which are a kind of low and thick-set pointer, draw upon a bird, it will creep against a stone wall, and allow itself to be taken with the hand; but generally it lies very close, and so near the nose of the "smell-dog" that some sporting Maltese use a casting net, and, throwing it over the dog, capture the quail at the same time. It is a curious fact that in the spring the birds are seldom observed to arrive at Malta in the daytime, and, therefore, it may be concluded that their migratory flights are executed at night. On arrival they are flat and plump, and are doubtless sustained when on the wing by internal nourishment; but after a

few days detention on the island through winds unfavourable to their flight, they become weak and poor in flesh, finding little or no food to keep up their condition. The theory that birds are supported during their flights by absorbing the superabundance of fatty matter which has accumulated just before the migratory season, will overcome some difficulties with regard to the mysteries of bird migration. Contrasting the migratory habits of the quail with the stay-at-home habits of his congener, the partridge, a modern versifier says of the latter:

> No fondness has he for exploring the earth,
> Contented to live in the land of his birth.

And adds:

> But his cousin, the quail, quite a different being,
> A thorough Bohemian, is all for sight-seeing:
> One week he's in Europe, in Africa next,
> By no change of latitude ever perplexed;
> A true Cosmopolitan, he has no ties
> Of country or climate—the world is his prize.
> As the sunflower aye to the sun turns its face,
> So follows he southward the sun in her race.
> No bird of its kind has such wide range as he;
> Europe, Africa, Asia, the Heathen Chinee
> All give him warm welcome; he finds a fit home
> Where'er for the nonce he may happen to roam.

By many naturalists it is supposed that the quail changes its place of abode, not as most other migrants

do on account of climate, but in order to obtain sufficient food. I can hardly agree with this theory, but it said to have been tested in various ways ; and perhaps the best proof of its truth is a story related by Yarrell to this effect. In the year 1844, when the harvest was almost as backward as it was in the memorable wet year, 1879, there was, according to credible witnesses, a field of barley in Devonshire still uncut in the month of December, and several quails remained in it till the end of the year, when it was carried during a sharp frost. The French have a proverb to the effect, that "a year of straw is a year of quails," and this, in the year just mentioned, was justified by the event, as, in addition to the birds which came over in the ordinary way in April and bred in France, a large flight passed over the country, northwards, early in July, and many remained to fall victims to the gun when partridge shooting commenced.

Quails begin to arrive in this country towards the latter end of April or the beginning of May, and to leave us, generally speaking, early in October. They are seldom seen after the middle of that month. A certain number breed with us, and I have seen bevies in Devonshire, Cambridgeshire, Gloucestershire, and other counties. Many years ago, in the Cambridgeshire fens and rough

land, they bred in considerable numbers, and the London market, I am told, was then supplied mainly from that district. But this source of supply failed long ago. However, as far as I can gather from reports from various localities, and from what I have personally observed, I am inclined to think that the number of breeding birds has increased during the last ten years or so. In the year 1879 there were an unusually large number of nests in north and east Devon, and I was glad to hear that sportsmen generally in those districts refrained from shooting the young birds, in the hope that the stock would be permanently increased. A writer in the *New Sporting Magazine* some time ago said that formerly the Isle of Thanet, in Kent, was celebrated as abounding in quails at all seasons, and that sportsmen from all parts resorted to this locality for quail shooting; but these happy days are not in the recollection of any living sportsmen. The southern districts of England are most affected by the quail, and they decrease in number as we go northwards. They are occasionally found in Scotland, even as far north as Aberdeenshire, but I fancy that of late years not so many are met with north of the Tweed as was the case formerly. A few birds remain with us during the winter, for, as Yarrell says, "though the quail

has usually been considered a summer visitor, so many instances have occured of its remaining in winter as to make it appear that a portion of them do not return southward in autumn."

Of late years the importation of quails into this country for table purposes has assumed large dimensions. They come chiefly from Egypt and Italy, the first arrivals being dated about the first week in March, just at a time when there is little in the way of bird-flesh as a table delicacy. The supply in 1879 was larger than ever, more than 500,000 having been consigned to Leadenhall Market alone. Ordinary sized quails weigh about 3oz. each, and these sell on an average, at Leadenhall, wholesale, for about 9s. a dozen, but larger and fuller birds up to 5oz. fetch about double that price. Housekeepers who buy them retail at the poulterers may, therefore, realize the great profit which is made by these tradesmen. Still smaller birds may be bought wholesale at 6s. or 7s. a dozen, and I often wonder that owners of shooting in districts suitable for them do not take more advantage of their cheap rate and purchase birds for turning down. With a little expense and perseverance, I am inclined to think they would establish themselves on many shootings, remaining during the winter, and breeding in the next

season. As I have already said, though but "small deer," quails are always most welcome additions to the sportsman's bag, especially as they require some skill to bring down, their rising being very sudden, and their flight very low and quick.

But to return for a moment to their importation. They are sent to this country in low boxes or cages, containing about 100 birds in each, pretty closely packed together, and in these they are kept, both in Leadenhall Market and at the retail poulterers. Some kindly natured persons consider this a very cruel method of dealing with these tender looking little birds, but in reality it is not. They like warmth, and this they get by being huddled together; and as they feed most heartily on the hemp and millet provided for them, and get fat thereon, it may be taken for granted that they are by no means unhappy during their cage life. Moreover, if they had greater space allowed them, and more head room, they would fight with one another so pertinaciously that in a few hours there would be little more left of them than of the famous Kilkenny cats. In Leadenhall they are kept in the shallow boxes, packed tier above tier in the rooms of the houses in and adjoining the market, and there feed and fatten in quiet, as least as far as quiet can be obtained

amid the scraping of thousands of feet in the cages. I paid a visit to one of these quail colonies one season, a visit more interesting than pleasant, as this scraping noise was very jarring to the ear, while the strange, hot, sickly odour which emanated from the multitude of birds was the very reverse of agreeable.

Speaking of the pugnacity of the quail, there is an old Greek proverb, which runs, "As quarrelsome as quails in a cage;" and among the ancients quail-fighting seems to have been as favourite an amusement as cock-fighting was at one time in this country. Indeed, to the present time Eastern potentates indulge in quail-fighting, the birds selected for the purpose being fed on stimulating food in order to make them more pugnacious than they are by nature. The modern versifier whom I quoted above credits the Chinese with being given to this cruel sport—

> Pugnacious as gamecock, the Chinese delighting,
> As erst did the ancients, we're told, in quail-fighting.

Though not provided with such weapons of offence as are some of the members of the *Gallinæ* order, the combativeness of the quail is undeniable, especially at the breeding season.

There have existed some curious ideas from time to

time concerning the flesh of quails. The ancients are said not to have eaten it, because, as Pliny tells us, "They supposed it to feed on hellebore and poisonous seeds and to be subject to epilepsy." Sir T. Elyot, in his "Castle of Helth," says, "Quayles, although they be of some men commended, yet experience proueth them to increase melancolye, and are of small nourisshinge." However, some ancients did eat them, the Israelites to wit; and they are eaten largely in the East now; and when the numbers caught are too great to be eaten fresh, they are split and laid out to dry in the sun, just as the Israelites are said to have spread out the *selavim* (quails) "all abroad for themselves round about the camp." Craven says that the quail "is the daintiest of eating." And he is quite right. I hardly know what metropolitan *gourmets* would do now without their quail in the spring and summer months; and without them housekeepers and *chefs* would often be at their wit's end to provide some toothsome morsel to enter on the concluding portion of their *menus*.

WOODCOCKS.

WOODCOCK SHOOTING.—*Mark Cock!*

WOODCOCKS.

As the shooting season advances it assumes different aspects familiar to sportsmen, and each is acceptable to them in its turn. Let us suppose that we have now come to November, which bears an evil character meteorologically. Of old it has been called "dreary" and "dark," and the poets have poured out the vials of their melancholy upon it. Tom Hood expended no little ingenuity in describing its *negative* aspect—

> No sun—no moon !
> No morn—no noon—
> No dawn—no dusk—no proper time of day—

And so on, with an infinity of "noes," concluding with—

> No warmth, no cheerfulness, no healthful ease—
> No comfortable feel in any member—
> No shade, no shine, no butterflies, no bees,
> No fruits, no flowers, no birds—
> November !

But, after all, abuse November as some will, it is a month to which thousands of sportsmen in all directions look forward with pleasure, and enjoy thoroughly when it comes. With it the hunting season sets in; with it begins the best fishing of the year for certain of the scaly tribes of our rivers and still waters; and with it, too, the most enjoyable to the true sportsman of our different kinds of shooting. It is, *par excellence*, the month for shooting snipe and woodcock, than which no birds come more acceptably to hand, and therefore, as I suggested in my opening chapter, it might well be called "woodcock or snipe month."

To deal with woodcocks in something like order and method, let my first note be ornithological. A very interesting bird is the woodcock, called by our Anglo-Saxon forefathers *Wuducocc* or *Wudecoc*. His ornithological name is *Scolopax rusticola*, and he is rightly so titled. He belongs to the *Scolopacinæ* or snipe family, which is a sub-family of the *Scolopalidæ*, the "long-bills." "Scolopax" (Σκόλοπαξ) is derived from the Greek σκῶλος or σκόλοψ, both of which signify "a sharp-pointed stake;" and, as he loves the woods, "Rusticola," *i.e.*, "wood-haunter," aptly distinguishes him from his first cousin the snipe, who shrinks from anything like

thick cover, except when a very sharp frost drives him into turnip fields or similar shelter. I am aware that *Rusticola* strictly means a "dweller in the *country*," but when Linnæus invented it, and gave it as a title to the woodcock, I think he had the idea of "wood" in his mind, otherwise it would not be a distinguishing title, for the snipe (*Scolopax gallinago*) dwells in the "country" as much as the woodcock.

Like most of our indigenous birds and summer and winter visitants, the woodcock is of sombre colour, but he is unquestionably one of the most prettily marked birds we have, for though his plumage is sober and subdued like that of the partridge, the delicate pencillings and mottling of his feathers are very beautiful, while a velvet-like softness of appearance pervades his whole body. How difficult it is to describe a bird's plumage! It may be said that that of the woodcock is charmingly varied with black and ash colour, white, grey, and red-brown, rufous and yellow, marbled, spotted, barred, streaked, and variegated, and with the different colours so disposed in rows, and crossed and broken at intervals by lines and marks of different shapes, that the bird appears at a little distance like the withered stalks and ferns, the moss-covered and lichen-dotted sticks and grasses,

by which he is sheltered in his lone retreats. You may sometimes stalk a woodcock and have a good look at him; but it is only a practised sportsman who can discover him by his full dark eye and his glossy silver-white tipped tail. Being a soft-fleshed bird and delicately put together, his beauty soon disappears after being carried in a pocket or game bag or packed for market. Our old dramatist, Ben Jonson, compares the head and bill of the woodcock to the bowl and stem of a pipe, and he takes occasion from the resemblance to have a sly hit at tobacco smokers. Thus, in "Every Man in his Humour" we have this dialogue:

FASTED.—Will your ladyship take any?

SARROLINA.—O peace, I pray thee! I love not the breath of the woodcock's head.

FAS.—Meaning my head, lady?

SAR.—Not altogether so, sir; but as it were fatal to their follies that think to grace themselves with taking tobacco, when they want better entertainment; you see your pipe bears the true form of a woodcock's head.

FAS.—O rare similitude!

Another old writer says that the woodcock, in consequence of the backward position of its large eyes, "has a singularly stupid air, in conformity with its habits." I beg respectfully to demur to both clauses of this statement, as the bird, at least in my opinion, is neither

stupid in appearance nor wanting in intelligence in his manner of life. That he is somewhat easily taken in gins, snares, traps, and nets, is a fact; but so are many other birds possessing a repute for much more astuteness than the old writer accords to the woodcock. In Beaumont and Fletcher's "Wit Without Money" we have Isabella saying—

> Oh Cupid!
> What pretty gins thou hast to halter woodcocks!

and in another place—

> If I loved you not, I would laugh at you, and see you
> Run you neck into the noose, and cry—"A woodcock."

But it was the high market value, even generations ago, which woodcocks commanded, rather than because they were less wide-awake than many other birds, that caused a large number to be taken by a variety of devices.

I hold, then, that it was a libel on the bird in former days to call a "simpleton" a woodcock. The bird has large eyes, certainly, full and dark. But in this respect he is only like many other nocturnal birds, which are asleep, or at least inactive and quiescent, when ordinary birds are up and doing, and *vice versâ;* and it may be added, that the backward position of the eyes is a beautiful provision of nature to save them from hurt when the bill

is buried deep in the soft earth, and also to enable the bird to see enemies approaching *a tergo*. Moreover, the eyes are particularly constructed for collecting the faint rays of light in the darkened vales and sequestered woodlands during its nocturnal excursions; and thus the bird avoids hitting itself against trees and other obstacles which oppose themselves in its flight.

It must not, however, be supposed that the woodcock relies to any great extent on his eyes in his search for food supplies, for the simple reason that almost all his food is out of sight, more or less deep down in the soft earth which he searches with his bill. It is on this wondrous instrument the birds depend to find their favourite food. The nerves in their bills, like those of the duck tribe, are very numerous. The upper mandible, which measures about 3in., is furrowed nearly its whole length, and projects somewhat at the tip, thus slightly overhanging the lower one. It is evidently susceptible of the finest feeling, and admirably adapted for searching the earth for worms and other insects, and also for turning over fallen leaves in quest of odds and ends of food. Woodcocks in confinement have been known to discover and draw forth every worm in the ground, which had been dug up in order to enable them to probe it with

their bills; and it has also been found that in confinement they will, after a time, take kindly to bread and milk. In the daytime they secrete themselves in the woods under bushes and evergreens, the holly, as most sportsmen know, being their favourite hiding place; and at night, punctual almost to a minute, they seek their soft spongy feeding grounds.

Bishop Mant thus happily describes the habits of the bird:

> The marsh his nightly haunt; the *wood*
> Within its secret solitude,
> Which on the kind their *name* bestows,
> Supplies their place of day's repose,
> Where moss-grown runnels oozing well
> Through bushy glen or hollow dell;
> There rest they, till the closing day
> The signal gives to seek their prey,
> Where the long worm and shrouded fly
> Close in their marshy burrows lie;
> Then issue forth by Nature's power,
> To banquet through the midnight hour,
> Till the grey dawn their ardour daunt,
> And warn them to their woodland haunt,
> Mysterious Power! which guides by night,
> Through the dark wood th' illumin'd sight,
> Which prompts them by unerring smell
> The appointed prey's abode to tell,
> Bore with long bill the invested mould,
> And feel, and from the secret hold
> Dislodge the reptile spoil!

In these happy islands there is no woodcock shooting

to be got, such as at different seasons of the year some other countries afford, notably on the sunny shores of the Mediterranean ; nor is the bird common enough in many localities for parties to lay themselves out exclusively for a day's cock shooting, as they do for a day with the partridges or pheasants. Still there are districts in Scotland, Wales, and especially in Ireland, where at certain times good bags may be made, and along our southern coast, too, a fair number of cock may occasionally be picked up. Years ago certain limited areas probably held more cocks than they do new, and some wonderful days' sport are on record. Even as late as 1863 a single gun killed no less than 245 birds in eight days' shooting in the Killarney district ; but it may be questioned whether this or any other district in the three kingdoms has of late years ever been well enough supplied with birds as to enable such an exploit as the above to be performed. Not that the sum total of the annual migration of cock to this country is less than it used to be ; for, on the contrary, it is really increasing each year ; and certainly the year 1878-9 was one of the best woodcock seasons ever known. In recent years the birds on their arrival seem to have distributed themselves more widely over the country than was their habit

formerly; and thus, though some districts are not so well off as they used to be, cock shooting generally has improved. It is an undoubted fact, too, which all sportsmen and naturalists will hail with satisfaction, that there is a considerable increase in the number of woodcock which remain in this country throughout the year and rear their young with us. In 1878 reports from Sussex, a favourite county with cock, from the Forest of Dean, and various districts of Scotland, show that there were more nests in those localities than had been known in any previous season. And this number is likely, I think, to show still further increase under the protection afforded by recent legislation to wild birds and wild fowl during the breeding season. Thus, though snipe shooting seems to show a continuous falling off year after year, owing to the continuous increase of draining operations, woodcock shooting is decidedly looking up, to the delight of most sportsmen, who would sooner bag a cock than any bird which flies.

Before, however, proceeding to deal with woodcock shooting as a sport, I would add a few more remarks in reference to woodcock ornithologically. It is generally held that two, if not more, varieties of this bird visit our shores, but I must confess I have always found a difficulty

in distinguishing them; and, perhaps, after all, the differences in the plumage are to be accounted for by the fact that the birds come to us from such an extensive range of country, and not because the birds are distinct varieties. Dr. Latham laid it down that we have three varieties; he says: "In the first the head is of a pale red, body white, and the wings brown; the second is of a dun or rather cream colour; and the third is of a pure white." But the last named certainly cannot be taken as a distinct variety, any more than a white lark or pied rook would be. A pure white woodcock has undoubtedly been seen, but is only to be accounted a *lusus naturæ*. Another authority recognises only two varieties, distinguished more by difference in size than in marking, the larger birds arriving in this country before the smaller. Mr. Daniel has observed that the earlier arrivals have their heads "muffled" to some extent with short feathers, especially the under parts. Other naturalists, again, have pointed out that the legs of the larger cock are of a greyish tint, inclining to rose colour, while the legs of the smaller birds are blue. Another view held by some is to the effect that the larger birds are the females and the smaller the males. Thus there seems to be considerable disagreement among

ornithologists in reference to the varieties of woodcock, and it is a matter on which further investigation appears to be needed. The statement that the large birds are females and the smaller males will certainly not hold water; nor will the theory that the sex of the birds may be known by certain markings in the plumage. Mr. Pennant held that in the hen bird the sex was shown by a narrow strip of white along the lower part of the exterior veil of the feather, the same feather in the male being spotted regularly with black and white; but dissection, by which, of course, the sex is easily ascertained, has disproved this view. Perhaps I lay myself open to the charge of ignorance when I say that, taking all things into consideration, I am inclined to hold that there is but one distinct species of woodcock which visits these islands, notwithstanding the considerable difference in the size of different birds, and considerable difference in plumage. The average weight of woodcock may be put at about twelve ounces, but birds of fourteen ounces, and even more, are not very uncommon, and Yarrell mentions much higher weights still.

It is not often that one finds a woodcock's nest. It is made on the bare ground, at the foot of a bank or near the root or stump of a decayed tree, generally

about the margins of thickets, but sometimes in more open localities. It is very carelessly formed of leaves, grass, and dried fibres. Four eggs is the general complement, but sometimes five. They are about the size of pigeons' eggs, and of a "blunt pear-shape." It is very difficult to describe their colour, but "yellowish brown, blotched with brown of a darker shade," or "rusty green, with dusky, ill-defined spots," or, again, "yellowish white, with reddish brown spots," all come near enough. The female bird, when disturbed during incubation, or after she has hatched, will occasionally assume an imperfect flight, after the manner of a partridge, pretending to be crippled, in order to lead the intruder to follow her away from the nest or young. The young generally leave the nest as soon as they have broken the shell, but the parent continues to attend to them till they can shift for themselves. If taken young they are extremely difficult to rear, though they will eat worms freely enough. It is an undoubtedly established fact that the female will carry her young a considerable distance in her claws, resorting to this when their haunt has been disturbed. I once saw, or at least I thought I saw, this operation performed. It was in one of Sir Thomas Acland's woods in Devon-

shire, and in a small open glade a woodcock got up within eight or ten yards of me. I had an excellent view of the bird, and perceived she was carrying something. I hardly had time to think on the matter before she was too far for accurate observation, but on reflection I came to the conclusion that she had one of her young in her claws. I felt more confirmed in this when a few minutes afterwards I found her nest. It was tenantless; but I have no doubt but that the rest of the young birds were not very far off, and that after I had passed on the alarmed mother returned and carried them one after another to the spot where she had deposited the first.

Speaking of woodcocks' nests, I am reminded of a female bird being photographed on her nest in May, 1879. A gentleman of Skipness, in Argyllshire, having been informed by his keeper that he knew of one sitting on four eggs, he immediately accompanied him to the spot, and they both watched it within a few yards for several minutes. On the following day the gentleman went again with a photographic camera, and exposed three plates, the lens being within six feet of the bird, and the front leg of the stand within two. On endeavouring to get a fourth view the bird rose—the wonder being that she had not risen before. How-

ever, she returned and successfully hatched off her young in a few days. Perhaps this is among the most novel uses to which the camera has yet been put, and is suggestive of its more extensive application with a view to illustrate natural history.

As to the migrations of woodcock. This is a subject which, like the question of the varieties of woodcock already mentioned, requires much greater elucidation than it has yet received. Read a dozen or more authors who deal with this topic, and you will hardly find two who will thoroughly agree together as to whence our immigrants come, and whither they go when they leave us. I am inclined to think this difference of opinion arises from the ignorance or forgetfulness of writers that the woodcock is one of the most widely distributed of birds over the whole world, and that he is everywhere an emigrating bird, without so fixed a principle or instinct as to his movements as many other birds have. He is constantly shifting his residence; and probably an individual woodcock, if he escapes the gun, visits many parts of the world in the course of three or four years in his peregrinations. I mean that he does not oscillate regularly between two countries, but goes a sort of round, a "grand tour," though of course he observes

certain seasons for his movements. In Europe, the Alps, Pyrenees, and other lofty mountain districts, hold large numbers of cock during the summer, whence they descend into the regions below in the winter. Some of these birds very probably find their way to our shores; and doubtless we have birds come to us in considerable numbers from France and Germany, in both of which countries few cock remain during the winter. Thus we are supplied to some extent by a migration from the south. But without doubt most of our woodcock are members of a migration from the north, from Norway and Sweden, and the coast of the Baltic. Bishop Mant, whom I have already quoted, speaks of the woodcock as

> Fresh from the Baltic's sounding shores;

and Gisborne in like manner poetises the migration of the bird:

> The woodcock, she, who in Norweigan dells,
> Or birchen glades Lapponian, near the swamp,
> Sucked from the spongy soil the prey, to cheer
> Her russet young; till winter's icy car
> On summer's step close pressing, from her realm
> Warned her—

That a large number come from Sweden is certain, as the time of their appearance and disappearance in that country coincides exactly with that of their arrival in and departure from Great Britain. It is strange, therefore,

that the majority of the birds arrive on our southern and not eastern coasts ; but such is the case, and the probable explanation of it is that their flight from the north, or, rather, north-east, is influenced by the circular or semi-circular currents of wind, the birds making their journey in the form of a curve.

The migration of the woodcock is spread over a considerable period, beginning generally with the first week in October and extending till the middle or even end of December. The October arrivals are but few ; the great bulk come in November, and in December the migration, or, as I should say rather, immigration, slackens considerably. The birds come sometimes when it is just getting dusk, but more generally in the night, or when the weather is dull and misty, and consequently it is but very seldom that an arrival is observed. It is the wind and not the moon which determines the time of their coming, and in this respect they are unlike their first cousins, the snipe, who almost invariably reach us about the full of the moon. The woodcock never come in large flights, like the majority of wildfowl or other birds, but separately, and dispersed in twos and threes. They sometimes settle on vessels at sea, and, like other migratory birds, being attracted by the glare of light,

are often killed by flying against lighthouses. Their flight must be extremely rapid and strong, for it is on record that in 1797, at the lighthouse upon the Hill of Howth, one broke a pane of plate glass more than three-eighths of an inch thick. The bird was picked up on the balcony outside, and was found to have broken its bill, head, breast bone, and both wings. On their arrival they are in a more or less exhausted state, and rest at once very near the shore. Occasionally they have been picked up in the streets of towns near the coast, for instance, at Rye, Sussex. A few days suffice to recruit their strength, and some betake themselves to the coverts within a moderate distance of the shore, while others are content with more open ground, and lie in the brushwood, furze, hedges, or any temporary cover. The poet puts it thus :

> When first he comes
> From his long journey o'er th' unfriendly main,
> With weary wing the woodcock drops him down,
> Impatient for repose, on the bare cliffs ;
> Thence with short flight the nearest cover seeks,
> Low copse or straggling furze, till the deep woods
> Invite him to take up his fixed abode.

But in the earlier part of the season a very large number, especially if the weather is temperate, soon make their way to high lying moors and bleak mountainous parts

of the country. Thus, in Devonshire, Dartmoor is a favourite residence for the early cock, and capital sport may be had in that region, particularly in the neighbourhood of Widdecombe-in-the-Moor. When, however, frost sets in and snow begins to fall they leave such districts for more sheltered spots, and thus they become distributed among the woods best suited to them. It is noticed that year after year their choice of covers is the same, some being more in favour than others, while some seem altogether shunned by the birds; and all this without any special reasons that we can ascertain.

Certain it is that some woods, even very small ones, seem always to hold cock, and some hardly ever, though, as far as we can see, the circumstances of both are alike. In long continued and severe frosts woodcock desert their inland retreats, and go to woods and cliffs near the sea, their reason for doing so being the fact that they can obtain no food except on the sands and marshes, which are not much affected by the frost in consequence of the influx and reflux of the salt water. This habit of the woodcock the poet has also noticed:

> The woodcock then
> Forsakes the barren woods, forsakes the meads,
> And southward wings his way, by Nature taught
> To seek once more the cliffs that overhang
> The murmuring main.

When, however, the frost is over they again reseek the inland coverts. In March they gradually gather along the coasts, and await in the neighbouring woods a favourable wind to assist them in their flight to other lands. They are observed, too, to migrate in pairs, the birds having mated before they leave us.

I will conclude these memoranda concerning the migration of woodcock by once more putting on record the habit of a Devonshire parson "of the old sort," who was very partial to cock, both from a sporting and gastronomic view. In the month of November, on a certain Sunday after Trinity, he used to make his way after the afternoon service to a favourite covert, just inside which he concealed himself, gun in hand, to have a shot at the woodcock, knowing from experience year after year that an arrival would take place about twilight. It is said that he never failed to get his first cock of the season. He called that particular Sunday "Woodcock Sunday."

In connection with the migrations of the bird a curious tradition once existed, and, for aught I know, exists still, in some woodcock districts. According to an old writer (Phillips, I believe) their early arrival and late tarriance in our islands denoted good crops in the following

autumn, and consequently ought to be a subject of general thankfulness. Thus he put it :

> The woodcock's early visit, and abode
> For long continuance in our temperate clime
> Fortells a liberal harvest.

I shall certainly not commit myself to an endorsement of this belief, but must leave it to ornithologists and agriculturists to collect statistics in order to determine the truth or untruth of the tradition, but I must confess that it seems to me just about as reliable as the various traditional signs of hard winters and hot summers which have been current for generations, and the logical connection between Tenterden Steeple and the Goodwin Sands.

And now I come to that part of my subject which will probably be more interesting to sportsmen who prefer bagging woodcock to reading about or investigating the nature and migrations of the bird, however interesting these may be. When a large party is out shooting, and woods are beaten with mathematical precision, with the regular accompaniment of beaters and dogs, each sportsman must keep the line and his place, and take his chance with the rest in obtaining a shot at a cock, as he does at a pheasant, hare, or rabbit. Any special

knowledge he may have of the habits of the woodcock, the likely places to find him and so forth, are but of little use to him under these circumstances. It is otherwise when the party is a small one, say when from two to four guns go out with the intention of working specially for woodcock, and the beating is not carried out in a strictly methodical manner. Each sportsman shoots at anything, and everything indeed, that gets up in the way of fur and feather that is an acceptable addition to the bag, but woodcock is the main object, and each gun is anxious to make the best score in this particular line. It is then that the knowledge of the woodcock's habits—the "where to find him" even before the "how to shoot him"—will stand the sportsman in good stead; and he who knows most about the ways of the bird and the nature of the ground to be shot over will be the most likely, provided he is as good a shot as his companions, to secure the most cocks. As woodcock affect particular covers in preference to others, so do they affect particular spots in these covers. They are particularly fastidious as to their tastes, being very critical as to soil, water, temperature, and shelter. For instance, on one side of a valley they may be found in goodly numbers, while on the opposite, which to ordinary observers presents no

special difference, hardly a bird is ever to be found. They love dense feathery coverts, where a profusion of springs brim over in shallow rivulets that run soaking through the roots of the grass and looping themselves in miniature lagoons with sandy or gravelly margins. But at the same time their standing ground itself, or sleeping ground, as perhaps it may be called, during the day is dry, for, unlike their congeners the snipe, they do not care to stand long on moist soil. Expect them, therefore, on sound ground close by moist. Note, also, that they particularly affect the cover of holly and juniper bushes, laurels, and rhododendrons, and, generally speaking, evergreens rather than leafless bushes or trees over their heads. The reason of this probably is that thick and varnished leaves prevent the radiation of heat from the soil, and being less affected by the refrigerating influence of a clear sky, they afford a comparatively warm and cosy shelter for the birds. But, *per contra*, it has been observed that cock are partial to the cover of an oak tree, among the fallen leaves of which they are fond of inserting their bills, though it is not quite certain what they find on them or under them to eat. Perhaps they "noozle" among them merely in order to keep their bills in a proper condition of polish,

or by the way of passing the time between their naps during the daylight hours. In a covert the cock are generally found on the sunny side, and particularly on banks facing the south-east; but, strange to say, that when found in heather, of which they are very fond as a shelter, the very reverse is almost invariably observed to be the case. While mentioning heather, a curious fact may be noticed, viz., that a peat bog burnt in patches seems to be an irresistible attraction to these birds.

Note, also, that in the early part of a frost cock will often be found in the ditches just outside coverts, and there, too, they will often settle after being flushed in covert. My first experience with woodcock in Devonshire was on the outside of coverts at the beginning of a frost. We found them in the ditches fairly plentiful, but hardly a bird inside the woods. Naturally enough this first experience made an impression on my memory. It is a great thing to know your country, and observe from year to year the particular spots the birds frequent. Old hands, well up in the local geography of the coverts, have an immense advantage over strangers in a day's stroll after cock. There are certain spots in certain coverts where, if there are any cocks in the country, one is almost sure to be found; and it is a remarkable fact that if you kill

a bird out of such a spot one day, another is almost bound to be found there on the next. Woodcock, like large trout, are solitary creatures, affecting particular, well defined haunts, and a vacancy made is almost invariably filled up within twenty-four hours.

When the cock shooting party is a large one, and extensive woods have to be beaten, the regular paraphernalia for a day in the covers is necessary—beaters, markers, and dogs. The work, too, must be carried out methodically, as I have already said, and a regularly digested plan of operations must be previously arranged before each cover is entered, and all parties concerned must minutely carry out the instructions given them, whether as gunners or attendants. All must take their stations at the spots indicated, advance only at the preconcerted signals, and pay attention to each others' signs and movements. Such a methodical day's shooting is not, indeed, to my mind, half so enjoyable as one when the guns number only three or four, and the attendants (say) half-a-dozen, and the woods are comparatively small; but we must take things as we find them in this imperfect world, where it is evident we cannot always have our own way. But whether the party be large or small, one thing is certain, viz., that

you cannot beat too closely for woodcock. Neither guns nor beaters should be in a hurry, and the dogs, whether they are spaniels, setters, working retrievers, or of any other class, should be well in hand and know their business, the grand desideratum of course being that no dog should flush a bird without a gun being within reach. Perhaps of all dogs a true Sussex spaniel has the best nose for a cock. He certainly expresses a very intense sense of canine joy when he touches on the trail of the longbill. Markers are of essential service. They should be placed on coigns of vantage wherever available, and in trees overlooking the top of the cover. A man so placed, if he keeps a good look-out, will be enabled to mark every cock that tops the trees, which is a great thing, as they often pitch in improbable places which few would think of beating.

In summing up one's past experience with cock, and endeavouring to recollect what one has observed as to their ways and habits when flushed, it becomes almost impossible to write methodically of them. I will, therefore, just jot them down as they come into my head. Cock, at times, lie very close indeed, and are difficult to flush, whereas on some days they are very easily put up. Generally speaking, they lie very

close before being flushed for the first time in the day, and many a one is left behind, owing to the guns, the beaters, and the dogs being too eager to press forward. They will often, too, lie close for the second and even the third time. On being flushed in a wood their general habit is to make for the clearest opening and get above the tops of the trees, over which they skim in a straight line before pitching in another part of the cover. Sometimes, however, they make a tortuous flight and drop in very near the same spot whence they were flushed. They have been frequently noticed also to fly round a wood as if in search for a safe retreat, and then cunningly hasten back and pitch in the very spot recently left. Manœuvres of this kind are inherent in woodcock, though, as I have noted, he has been credited with being a silly bird.

To act as a marker for a few days would give a sportsman a knowledge of the habits and flights of woodcocks which would be of great service to him. No one ever saw a cock entangled in the boughs or bushes when rising, however suddenly he may have been disturbed. He seems to remember in a moment where his opening is. I fancy I have observed woodcock on rising designedly put a big tree between themselves and the gun with a view to safety. They frequently, at the instant of alight-

ing, run several yards from the spot where they are marked down. They often pitch on the outside borders of a cover or in the boundary ditches, especially if the beaters are a very noisy party. The regularity and sameness of the flight of the cock is very remarkable. They appear as familiar with all direct openings and glades in the woods they frequent as if they had used them for years. Day after day, and week after week, on being flushed, they fly off by the same route, through the same glades, and over the tops of the same trees. Even in the open their line of flight does not vary 20yds. They appear to have certain retreats and certain roads leading to and from them. Perhaps these remarks may seem a little at variance with some I have made before; but I dare say most of my readers will follow me, and distinguish between what I say of the habits of the cock generally, and their occasional variation from them. A sportsman cannot be too well posted in all such matters, and he who is well up in them has considerable advantage over those who have not cultivated the habit of observation, and so have failed to acquire that knowledge which would often be very useful to them.

But, after all, be it remembered there is a great deal of uncertainty about woodcock, as the weather of a few days

previous to the shooting has a great influence on their ways and habits. For instance, after a very stormy night they will lie particularly close, but after a very bright frosty one they seem particularly wary. They are most difficult of approach during a thaw. In a frost they will not only lie outside the woods, as already noticed, but abandon their usual haunts altogether, and be found scattered under hedgerows, in dry ditches, in orchards, and even in gardens close to houses.

And now for the "how to shoot him." Is the woodcock a difficult or easy bird to hit? And, on what principle should a sportsman endeavour to deal with him? I think that, generally speaking, a woodcock is a fairly easy bird to bring to bag; and those who are entitled to be called good "all-round" shots—I do not mean absolutely "dead" shots—as a rule account for a cock if they get anything like a fair chance at him. In open ground, and rocky districts where there is but little bush, and what cover there is is low, for instance, on Dartmoor, especially in the neighbourhood of Widdecombe, where, as I have already said, there is generally good cock shooting early in the season, the birds get up leisurely and fly steadily, thus presenting an easy enough shot to the average sportsman. A still more easy shot do they present when

they rise out of a ditch by a cover side. They then generally fly straight away for some distance along the ditch, working their wings apparently almost as heavily and lazily as a barn owl or a heron, almost giving one the idea that they were not in the least hurry to get out of shot. Under such circumstances a mere tyro in the use of the gun, if he be not flurried at the apparition of the much-to-be-desired *scolopax*, ought to make sure of his bird. It was under such circumstances, I well remember, that I got my first, and, indeed, second, third, and fourth woodcock, by the side of the covers between Haldon and Luscombe, which lies at the back of that prettiest of little English watering places, Dawlish, in south Devon. I had never before seen a woodcock on the wing, and I must confess that I shot at the first without really knowing what the bird was, the idea of its being a cock not entering my head. I shot merely out of curiosity at a bird with which I was unfamiliar, and which flopped away in so apparently unconcerned a style. My day's experience in killing four cock, the three others rising as quietly, flying as leisurely, and presenting as easy a shot as the first, gave me an impression that there was no bird, among those which sportsmen wish to secure, more easy to kill than a woodcock. But this impression

did not last long; for, during the same season, it only required a very little experience in Sir Thomas Acland's thick covers near Broadclyst, and in other parts of the fair land of the west, to show me that a woodcock, especially in a closely timbered wood, often presents the most difficult shot of any bird that flies.

The truth is, that no birds vary their flight so much as woodcock, according to the surroundings of the spot from which they are sprung, the state of the weather, and, indeed, many other circumstances, some of which I shall incidentally notice, still making my observations in a haphazard and unmethodical way. They are very uncertain birds, too, as regards the length of their flight, some days flying slowly and lazily, and to a short distance only, while on others they fly straight away when clear of cover to a long distance and quite out of marking range. The rate of speed at which they will fly is very uncertain, for sometimes, as I have said, their movements are slow and laboured, as it were; sometimes they are twisting, darting, and dodging; while sometimes also a heavy lazy flight is suddenly changed within a few yards into one of surprising swiftness.

Woodcock have much greater power of wing than many persons suppose, though they don't always show

it. In fact their flight is sometimes like that of an owl, anon that of a hawk, anon that of a twisting, turning, zigzagging, snipe. Next to the occasions when they rise out of a ditch by the edge of a cover, the fairest shot woodcock present is when they get above the trees of a wood, for then their flight is generally steady, though quick, and by firing more or less in advance of the bird, according to the rate of its flight, an average marksman ought to bag at least three out of four; but it is not often that such shots can be obtained, at least by the guns in cover. The outside guns have the best opportunities in this respect. In high bare-stemmed larch or fir woods a good chance is given the gun when the bird has got above the low undergrowth but has not reached the branches of the trees; but such woods, with what may be called a clear space for a shot, are not often to be met with, and when they are, the clear space, as I have called it, is intersected with the stems of the trees, and I have already given our game the credit of dodging deliberately behind these and designedly putting them between the gun and his cockship. I have in my memory a particular instance of this. Of course it may have been an undesigned coincidence, but I sprung a cock within a few yards of my feet, far too close to shoot at him, so I

gave him law. The spot was fairly open, and only a few trees within fifteen to thirty yards, and these, with one exception, with slight stems. The exception was a sturdy oak about twenty yards off, and to this the cock flew so straight, that he seemed as if he intended to dash himself against it, but, quick as lightning, when within a foot or less of it, as far as I could judge, he performed a semicircle and I saw him no more. I shall always believe that he made for this tree deliberately, and keeping the line in his mind, took care that it should be between me and him till he was "lost to sight," though by no means "to memory dear." I ought to have fired just before he got to the oak, and it was my fault, not his, that I did not. Taking all things into consideration, I think the best advice to a sportsman in cover is to shoot as quickly at a cock as he can—take a snap shot in fact on the very first opportunity, *i.e.,* of course after the bird, if it has risen very close to him, has got to something like a legitimate shooting distance. Some sportsmen (but very few) can afford to wait a little on some occasions; but they must have an exceptionally good eye and perception for the opening for which the cock is likely to make. As a general rule, in nine cases out of ten, if you wait for a really good chance, you may not get one at all. The

versifier has put the matter about rightly when he says:

> Where woodcocks dodge, there distance knows no laws;
> Necessity admits no room for pause.

Let a sportsman note, too, that each successive time the same cock is flushed, though it will generally lie the closer, the more rapid and snipe-like will be his flight.

Another habit of the cock, which a sportsman may remember to his advantage occasionally, is his tendency to fly against the wind, if there is enough of it in cover to be felt, when he is being hunted by a dog *down* wind. The sportsman, therefore, when he notices a dog on the trail, may often be well advised to stand still in a fairly open spot, and wait in the hopes that the bird, when sprung, will make towards him. It may be also well to remember that a cock, when shot dead, is often hard to find, as few dogs can hit off the body-scent of a dead bird when it has not moved from the place where it fell. It is said, but I cannot endorse the statement from personal experience, that a Newfoundland dog is most serviceable in retrieving cock, as he has the credit of marking with wonderful accuracy of *eye* where a bird falls.

For woodcock shooting in covers—I mean in woods—it is well that the gun should be as short as possible, say

28in. in the barrels, or less, if you can get a shorter weapon you can rely upon. The size of the shot you should use depends on the general character of the shooting, whether you are working almost exclusively for cock, and expecting little else, or whether pheasants, hares, rabbits, and other odds and ends are likely to be the more numerous, and are all being worked for. In the latter case, No. 4 or 5 shot is best employed. I prefer the latter, as when you do flush a cock you have a little better chance of getting him with it, and it does not disfigure him so much as No. 4. If you are expecting more cock than anything else, and are even inclined to let other things go unheeded, rather than lose a shot at a cock after having discharged both your barrels, then No. 6 is quite large enough; No. 7 is perhaps the best size; and even No. 8 will account for a cock at 40 yds. Like a snipe, a woodcock does not require very hard hitting to bring him down, and the more "corns" sent after him the better. Taking all things into consideration, No. 6 is the most serviceable size for a day's shooting, as, practically, it suits almost anything in the way of fur or feather. A friend of mine when out for a day's miscellaneous cover shooting, and a fair supply of woodcock may be expected, always has No. 4 in one barrel

for pheasants, hares, &c., and No. 7 in the other, which he reserves entirely for woodcock. I often follow a similar plan when snipe shooting over a tract where duck, widgeon, and other larger game may get up, having No. 8 and No. 5 or 4 in my respective barrels, and I have often found the advantage of it. It has, I believe, been argued, that having to consider which trigger to pull steadies the shooter; but I doubt it; it sometimes sadly confuses him, unless he has thoroughly habituated himself to the practice. At all events, generally speaking, on snipe ground he can pay more attention to his gun, and keep himself more collected than he can in cover, where the walking is more difficult, and more obstacles are in the way. I therefore do not follow my friend's example in cover shooting, nor would I advise young sportsman to adopt it, though I know he makes his practice pay, in generally getting more than his share of cock.

Most rightly has woodcock shooting been extolled for many generations of sportsmen, and well has it been termed "the fox-hunting of shooting," for as chasing the fox is more pleasurable and more exciting, and a higher class of sport than following the tame deer or the timid hare, so is woodcock shooting—*i.e.*, a really good

day's shooting, when the beating is almost or altogether exclusively for cock—far beyond a day with the grouse, the partridges, or the pheasants. And even when the day is a miscellaneous one the cocks are more eagerly desired and more highly prized than all the other denizens of our woods and coverts put together; and when the bag is turned out the head of cock is more carefully counted than all the other contents. I think it is Colonel Hawker who says that a real good sportsman feels more gratified by flushing and killing a woodcock, or even a few snipe, than by bags full of game that have been reared on his own or neighbour's estate. Quite right; there may not be much logic in this feeling, but it may fairly be accounted for by the fact that a sportsman considers woodcock as creatures *feræ naturæ* in a far higher sense than our ordinary game, fur or feather, is; and who shall say that it is not the natural instinct of man to seek to capture or slay the wilder animals of creation rather than the tamer, and those whose finding is certain rather than those whose finding is comparatively uncertain? True, there may not be the same excitement and pleasure in killing a woodcock as in securing some very rare bird, such as a capercailzie or a bustard; but of all birds which come within reach of the ordinary sportsman's gun during

the shooting season none can compare with *scolopax rusticola* in the intense satisfaction he yields to the fortunate gun who bags him. When sport flags, the dogs are listless, and the beaters seem very weary and husky in their voices, and the sportsmen themselves are growing apathetic, what a change comes over the spirits of the whole party at the welcome cry of "mark cock!" All are on the *qui vive* instantly. You almost tremble with excitement; and though, perhaps, a fairly cool sportsman under ordinary circumstances, you are hardly master of yourself now. If the bird comes at all your way you feel bound to blaze away at him at even an impossible distance, on the off chance of stopping him with a stray pellet; and though, on the other hand, the opportunity he offers may amount to a certainty, you are not unconscious of a certain flutter, for should you miss him ignominiously, you must hang your head when comparing experiences at the end of the beat. On the contrary, should he come down, you step an inch or two taller, in the modest consciousness of being the hero of the moment; and the memory of each slain bird is kept fresh through the season, and often long after it, by the pointed feathers from under the pinion displayed in your billy-cock. This is especially the case when cock are some-

what scarce. You may miss any number of pheasants, and even slowly "loppiting" hares—aye, even pot shots at "listening" bunnies; but if you can claim the greatest take of cock to your gun, you have, without question, secured the highest honours of the day.

No man who has ever carried a gun forgets his "first woodcock" to the day of his death. You may forget your "first salmon," or even the "first kiss at love's beginning," as the poet hath it, but never your "first woodcock;" and you may fish, shoot, and hunt in any and every land, and have the best of sport, but of many days *cretâ notandi* in your sporting diary, the good days with the woodcock will be marked with the whitest pencil and be for ever fraught with the pleasantest recollections.

And now, in conclusion, let me descend from the poetry to the prose of woodcock shooting—from the mental to the bodily pleasure associated therewith—from the sporting to the culinary merits of our *scolopax*. It would take almost a volume to sing adequately the praises of the woodcock from a gastronomic point of view. He is worthy of all that has been or can be said in the way of eulogium. Many generations ago the birds were so plentiful that they used to be employed as "garnishes," for we find in an old almanac of cookery, called "The

Ladies' Diary," and dated first in 1704 A.D., that in the "Bill of Fare for January" is mentioned "a roast turkey garnished with woodcocks." It is hardly necessary to say that now their price forbids their use in this supplementary way, as it were, a woodcock now generally fetching in the market from 5s. to 10s. Here let me note, by the way, that during very hard winters woodcock can be bought in London and elsewhere at a price as low as a shilling, or even less, each; but they are half, or rather whole starved creatures (like the cheap snipe), mere feathers, skin, and bones, which are captured by thousands more dead than alive in different districts, and in those districts could be bought for a penny and three-halfpence each.

When cocks are at their best, if ever a *gourmet* is justified in expending from a shilling to eighteenpence per mouthful for any *bonne bouche* he is inclined to indulge in, he is justified in buying woodcock at their highest modern price. A man or woman who cannot appreciate a woodcock is more to be pitied than one who cannot recognise the gastronomic charms of native oysters, truffles, or olives, or a bottle of the best Burgundy. When the birds first arrive on our coasts they are commonly in poor condition, and their flesh is compara-

tively insipid; but when they have sojourned a little while with us it is improved in richness and delicacy. They are at their best, I think, in the months of January and February, if the weather is fairly open; but, *notâ bene*, their flavour deteriorates (as does that of almost all birds) in March, because of the near approach of the breeding season. The old and well-known rhyme seems to make the partridge and woodcock the two best birds in creation—

> If the partridge had but the woodcock's thigh,
> 'Twould be the best bird that ever did fly;
> If the woodcock had the partridge's breast,
> 'Twould be the best bird that ever was dressed.

—but I take it that this refers to the size rather than the flavour of the different parts of the birds mentioned, and intimates that the breast of a woodcock is wanting in plumpness and that the thigh of the partridge is rather meagre. This is the case; but, though the partridge is a most excellent bird, no well educated palate would compare it with the woodcock. The French and Italian cooks serve woodcock in a variety of ways, and woodcock pie and woodcock pudding, *à la pouding de becassine* (snipe), is a lawful way of dealing with the bird, and he is very serviceable in a pie of mixed game; but really there

is the only *legitimate* method (at least, in my opinion) of dealing with him, and that is our usual English method of roasting on toast, which conserves the subtle essences and flavours exuding from the body under the influence of the heat. I hold, too, that as with snipe, so with the woodcock, there is a *juste milieu* in the amount of cooking to which he should be subjected—not too much or too little. To "carry him through the kitchen" and serve him nearly raw is a barbarous invention of fashion, while to roast him to a cinder is a shameful spoiling and wasting of a good thing. Moreover, as is the case with the snipe, the sooner a cock is cooked after he is killed the better, for the fuller is his *proper* flavour. It is more than a mistake to keep him till he gets "high." It is his nature to be "high" without keeping, at least to be "high" in the best sense of the word. It is said that a celebrated *gourmet* instructed his *chef* to hang a woodcock for some days, and then to clean and insert the trail of a fresh bird. There was reason in this, for it is the trail specially which ought not to be allowed to get high. If you wish to be correct when dismembering a woodcock, speak of "thighing" him, as you speak of "winging" a partridge, "lifting" a swan, and "breaking" a deer; at least you will be using the

old technical term of the carver. The proper wine to drink with a woodcock or with snipe is Burgundy or good Bordeaux, the former for choice, in accordance with the rule—dark wine with dark flesh and white wine with white flesh.

SNIPE.

SNIPE SHOOTING.—*Good Ground.*

SNIPE.

SNIPE shooting has long been one of the most popular pursuits connected with the gun. To most sportsmen it has a special charm, and to most it is a special object of ambition to be a good snipe shot. Its charm to a true sportsman consists in no slight degree in its uncertainty and difficulty—the uncertainty of finding your quarry and the difficulty of bagging it when found. On grouse moors you soon know what stock of birds you have, and in the earlier part of the season your game is easy enough to kill, and when the birds get wild you can always fall back on "driving" them. The same remarks apply to partridge shooting: the number of coveys you have to deal with are soon summed up, and as the season progresses and you make your bags, the less you have for future sport. As to your pheasants, you know pretty

well to a head what you have in your preserves, if the rascally poachers have not paid them a visit; and even in a "rough" country, where the birds breed naturally, you generally have fairly accurate information before the 1st of October as to the number of nides which await your assault. Thus in grouse, partridge, and pheasant shooting—though to make good bags, or at least as good as your stock of game will permit, requires the skill of a good sportsman—proceedings are straightforward enough: your birds are on your ground, and with perseverance and straight shooting you will account for your fair share of them. But with snipe shooting the case is somewhat different: you cannot reckon on your supply of birds even on the best grounds, as it varies from season to season in a much greater degree than the supply of our larger game, and it varies also from month to month, week to week, and day to day. Another charm of snipe shooting is, that it comes in when the great bulk of other shooting is well-nigh come to an end, the great and formal *battues* at pheasants of course excepted. It is a winter sport, and affords a pleasant variety of shooting to lovers of the gun, who have in many instances tired of pursuing what may be called the stock-in-trade game.

As I have already said, in my notes on woodcock in the last chapter, the snipe family is known to naturalists by the name of *Scolopacidæ*, from the Greek word, which signifies a long pointed state. The English word "snipe" is found in various forms in the German and kindred languages, the letters *sn* in this, as in so many other words connected with the nose, *e.g.*, *sn*eeze, *sn*ore, *sn*out, &c., being the characteristic letters; and in all its forms it means "the bird with a long bill." Why Shakespeare, or rather others before him, used the word "snipe" to signify a fool or blockhead, I cannot imagine, for, to my thinking at least, our *scolopax*, notwithstanding certain eccentricities, is by no means one of the "fools" of the feathered creation.

There are four kinds of snipe found in this country. One is the Great Snipe (*Scolopax major*), sometimes called the Solitary, woodcock, or double snipe, considerably larger than the common species, and weighing from 7oz. to 9oz. It is but a straggling visitor to these islands from high northern latitudes, and never stays to breed with us. It rises in silence, is less rapid in flight than the common snipe, and not unlike the woodcock when that bird, under certain circumstances, *sometimes* flies away more like a barn owl than any other bird.

Another of our four species is Sabine's Snipe (*S. Sabini*), also called the Black Snipe, from the prevalence of dark tints in its plumage and the absence of white or reddish yellow, and it is *very* rare in this country. Naturalists will have it that it is a distinct species; but I venture, with all deference, to suggest that, after all, this colouring may be a freak of nature. A well-known sportsman in 1862 shot a snipe of a beautiful cream colour, with rose-coloured beak and legs, and the shooting of perfectly white ones have been recorded from time to time. And yet few would venture to say that these birds were distinct species of *Scolopacidæ*. Then there is the little Jack Snipe (*S. gallinula*), who can only score between 2oz. and 3oz. in the scale—a cunning atom of a wildfowl, familiar enough and independent, too, in the way he will await your approach within a few yards of him. When he gets up he is somewhat similiar to the common snipe in his wayward flight, and he will waggle before your gun like a butterfly in a squall. He steadies himself in a very marked manner at intervals. In one of these intervals have at him. But, however good shot you may be, you will not always kill him, as he presents but a miserably poor target. A bad shot can get almost a whole day's sport out of one, as a jack seldom travels

much over 150 or 200 yards, and, like the pugilists, "comes up fresh." May I be pardoned for again putting into print the old story of the jack snipe and Quartermaster Molloy, of the 64th Regiment? It may not be known to some of my younger readers. The said quartermaster, when quartered in Ireland, became passionately fond of snipe shooting. His happy hunting ground held a jack snipe, which gave him immense sport, frequently falling almost as soon as he had fired, and filling the gallant sportsman's heart with hope and joy. But lo! as often as he fell he would get up again and fly a little further. On one occasion Molloy fired eighteen times at it. In fact, it served him a whole season. One day, crossing the bog which he haunted, and when he was only armed with a stick, it rose as usual. "There's my old friend," he cried, and he let fly his stick in an unguarded moment and killed the poor little jack. Ever afterwards, when his brother officers flushed a jack, they used to shout, "There goes the quartermaster!" I have often found jack on the Essex marshes, but the greatest number I ever met with in one day was on Cawsand Beacon, a part of Dartmoor near Oakhampton.

And now for the fourth species. This is the Common Snipe—*Scolopax gallinago*, or, as some naturalists call

him, *Gallinago media*, because, I suppose, he is midway in size, or rather weight, between the solitary and jack snipe, weighing, as he does, from three and a half or four to six ounces. He is called also the Moor Snipe, the Bleater, and Heather-bleater. The general appearance of this bird is known to most persons, and when fresh killed, and its plumage is smooth and unstained, there is not a prettier bird among our British fauna. Not a gaudy bird, but he has almost every shade of sombre colour known, in bars, stripes, spots, and mottles; his back looks and feels like velvet, and his belly is whiter than snow, while his elegant contour is the very essence of delicacy and refinement.

His bill is, perhaps, more curious than that of any other bird. It is copiously supplied with nerves, and highly sentient, and probably has both a sense of touch and smell in a most acute degree. We do not yet know the exact *rationale* of a snipe's feeding. As he walks along, with his bill nearly touching the ground, when searching for food, and thrusting it more frequently into some spots than others, it may be conjectured that by a sense of smell he ascertains the whereabouts of his animal or vegetable food, and by a sense of touch secures it. A snipe has never been noticed to perform a definite act of

swallowing, so we must suppose that the food passes up his bill and so down his throat by an imperceptible kind of suction. To those who are interested in tracing "design," it may be interesting to notice that the eyes of a snipe are placed far back in his head, so that when he probes the soil with his bill "up to the hilt" they are out of harm's way, and can easily observe an enemy approaching *a tergo*. It is said that the snipe use their bills for another purpose, viz., to aid them in rising on the wing. Whether they do so or not is a question which has from time to time been as fiercely debated in the columns of journals devoted to sport and country pursuits as that of "do vipers swallow their young?" I certainly never saw a snipe rise by placing his beak on the ground in the preliminary attitude, as it were, of what boys call "pitching a pie," nor do I know anyone who has. Still, a snipe's eccentricities are not to be limited by the shortsightedness of human observation; and, after all, those who are lucky enough to have been able to see snipe feed might, at the same time, have been able to see them rise.

Most of my readers have heard of the "drumming" of snipe, or themselves have heard them "drum." How this drumming was produced was once a disputed

question, but it is now settled. It is only heard in the breeding seasons, and is produced by the quill feathers of the male birds when in the air and swooping down towards the nest of the female. It may be taken as a kind of intimation of "I'm coming, my love, my dear," after the manner of the "Come into the garden, Maud," business.

The common snipe is perhaps the most widely distributed of all the feathered creation, and it breeds in almost every country under the sun. It is to be found in almost every part of the United Kingdom, that is, in districts suited to its habits and requirements. Not very many years ago the neighbourhood of London was famous for snipe; and persons not long dead have shot snipe in Regent-street, *i.e.*, on the site of Regent-street, and many now alive have done so on the ground where Paddington Station now stands, and in and about Westbournia. An occasional *Scolopax gallinago* even now will alight during his nocturnal flight on the banks of the Serpentine, and by the lake in Regent's Park, the lights of London acting as a special attraction for him. Snipe, too, are found from time to time sporadically distributed north of London, in the Hendon, Hampstead, and Hackney districts, but of course no sane sportsman would go expressly to look

for them there. But there is actual snipe ground commencing, I might almost say, at the other side of the iron bridge over the Lea, just beyond the East India Docks. I am by no means an old man, and I have shot many a couple of snipe on the site of the Victoria Docks, and on both sides of the road between the iron bridge aforesaid and Plaistow. But this was more than thirty years ago, when there were not half a dozen houses on this road, and when Canning Town and Silver Town—where now "Londoners over the border" dwell in their thousands—were hardly dreamt of. It seems but yesterday that wild ducks used to breed in these districts, and many a time in August have I shot "flappers"—I feel almost ashamed to own it—on these once happy hunting grounds. I well remember getting nearly a whole brood within a gunshot of the Old Barge House public-house, then the solitary house at North Woolwich, near the spot where now the "People's Caterer" provides his classic and refining entertainments for modern Englishmen and Englishwomen in North Woolwich Gardens.

Even now, almost within hearing of Bow Bells, snipe may be got on the East Ham marshes, and you may tramp on, leaving the Becton gas works on your left hand, till you come to Barking Creek. If you make your

way to Creeksmouth, near the northern outfall of the Metropolitan sewage, and cross the water in a boat which you can hail, you will find yourself in that part of the Essex marshes which, as yet, has been but little encroached on by the works of man's hands in the shape of bricks and mortar.

Having been born and bred on the borders of these marshes, they have a special attraction for me, particularly as a snipe and wild fowl district. They are part of that belt of coastland which stretches along the south of Essex and round eastward by Suffolk and Norfolk to Lynn Regis, a large portion of which is more or less good snipe ground. The Essex marshes proper, a flat, grassy expanse, intersected by innumerable ditches, averages a mile and a half to two miles in breadth, between the Thames and the Essex "Uplands," and stretch away from Barking to Southend with but few breaks. The grass in mid-winter is emerald green, and will fatten a bullock to the acre. To my eye it is a charming bit of country—a wilderness, if you like, but in reality a broad fruitful valley—bounded on the north by the rich Essex corn lands, with their white villages and church spires and towers, and on the south by the Thames and the Kent hills beyond it. There may be

something monotonous about the Essex marshes, with only a marshman's cottage dotted here and there, a poplar or two, or solitary willow calling attention to the general absence of trees, the occasional reed shore (home sometimes of a "vagrom" fox), with the whole superfices flat as a billiard table, and scored by ditches, and only broken to the eye by innumerable gates, cattle pounds, and posts for the cattle to scratch themselves against; but I do not envy the frame of mind of the man who can see no beauty in the grand wild. Here it was—before I could hardly raise a gun to my shoulder, and was glad to get a pot shot, resting it on the top bar of a gate—that I used to stroll away the autumn and winter days in search of wildfowl, and I soon got to know every inch of the ground over the Barking, Dagenham, Rainham, Wennington, and Aveley marshes. Gradually I extended my operations by Thurrock and Tilbury to the Corringham district, where the marsh broadens and is dominated by the villages and churches of the place just named and of Fobbing and Pitsey, but I limited my excursions generally to the creek which bounds Canvey Island on the west. Thus I gradually learned the marshes and the habits of the snipe which frequented them. In my earlier days they were grand shooting grounds, and even now afford

at seasons excellent sport. The truth is, the marshes have been too much civilised. The ditches, for instance, in former days were allowed to "run wild," and a little extra rain would flood them and make nice swampy edges for some yards, conducive to the habits and comfort of snipe and to their facility of feeding. Now many of them are kept geometrically trimmed by the spade, and the water drained off by scientific sluices. Still there are enough good "rants," as they are called in some districts, and "fleets," as they are called in others—by the way, the waters of these fleets contain some fine carp and tench—left to hold a fair quantity of snipe. I do not mean that you may expect them to get up in "wisps," as they do in some districts in Scotland, or on some of the Irish bogs, or on favourite "walks" on the Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire fens, or on special spots in Dartmoor in Devonshire, or in some parts of Wales; but on the Essex marshes they are "plenty" (as the Devonshire folk say, using a substantive for an adjective, after their manner) at certain times and at certain places, if you know the times and places to look for them. November and December are the best months on the Essex marshes, especially the former, about the time of full moon, when the "little strangers" come in the greatest numbers,

particularly if there be some east in the wind about that time.

The best snipe ground on the marshes is, in my experience, that near Corringham, the nearest station to which is Stanford-le-Hope, on the London and Southend Railway, which runs along the upper side of the marshes, more or less, during its entire length. You can, however, get out at Barking, Rainham, Purfleet, Tilbury, or Pitsea; and thus, it may be said, there is snipe shooting for Londoners within from half an hour to an hour and a half's journey from the metropolis. However, I must not let it be supposed that all a sportsman has to do is to ship himself on board the train at Fenchurch-street, to alight at any of the above stations, and wander about the adjoining marsh at his own sweet will. He will soon find out his mistake, for it will not be long before he is spotted by some of the marshmen, who act as a sort of keepers, or by an upland farmer, who will want to know by whose authority he is trespassing on his marshes in pursuit of game. The marshes are as much private property as the uplands, and without leave one has no more right on the former than on the latter. You must get your permission from a tenant, and then, with

proper credentials, there is not much said if you do not keep strictly to his land.

And when you have got permission pray don't think that all is straight sailing. You must know where the snipe are usually to be found, for otherwise you may wander about a whole day without springing one, though there may be many on the marsh. And when you do know their favourite haunts you must know your way to get to and from them. The marsh is divided by ditches into fields of from five to fifty acres, and there is but little in the way of landmarks to guide you. Nothing is so easy as to lose one's way and get absolutely pounded; and I know no more painful predicament than for a stranger to be suddenly enveloped in a fog on this great gramineous expanse. He has a good chance of spending the night on it, unless he is possessed of a keen topographical instinct. Your best plan is to make friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness with some marshman of the district you frequent, and get him to accompany you with a leaping pole. There are planks over some of the ditches, and these, of course, he knows by heart, but the pole will often save a long and useless walk. He is contented with a modest honorarium, and is well worth it; and you will do wisely to arrange with

him or the friendly farmer to send you a post card when there has been an arrival of snipe. But when you "know all about it," and everything seems in favour, make up your mind for disappointment. You can, without much trouble, get many a blank day on the Essex marshes.

Here let me say that further remarks I am about to make on snipe shooting on the Essex marshes will apply to a great extent to snipe shooting elsewhere. It is not on any spot indiscriminately, even in a good snipe district, that you will find your quarry. On the Essex marshes it is not *every* ditch which holds him, but only those with swampy edges, with little earthen hillocks and patches of tussocky grass, where he can paddle about up to his ankles, if I may so call them, in water, and search the rich mud for food, like the wildfowl in Virgil's "Georgics," which

Dulcibus in pratis rimantur prata Caistri.

When the water in the ditches is above the average level, or King Frost reigns, then in vain will you search the sides of "rants" and "fleets;" and when these special haunts are in the best condition to retain snipe, you must know where to find those haunts, for they are only here and there in the marshy expanse. Of course it

is easy enough to say that snipe are to be found in fair and often large numbers in the Essex marshes, in Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, and in several districts in the north of England, and in the Lake country, as also in Wales, and Scotland, and Ireland; but to be a successful sportsman you must be well up in your geography, not only generally but specifically; and you must know, *i.e.*, as far as can be known, the habits of these interesting birds in the different localities they affect, their times and seasons, and the different atmospheric and meteorological circumstances under which they may be expected on certain definite grounds, or, as I should rather say, haunts.

I know every inch of Dartmoor, a good snipe district in its season, but it will take you almost a lifetime to master the vagaries of snipe there, even though you know the nature of the land fairly well. My own experience leads me to believe that in such a district the snipes are to be generally found—*i.e.*, provided the ground is suited to them—to leeward of the ridges and "tors." They seem to hate the wind blowing on them. I well remember a day's shooting about Cawsand Beacon, near Okehampton, some years ago, when I could not find a snipe to windward, though there were as many

almost as one could wish for under cover, as it were, of the hill. But this fact, of course, is of little avail to snipe shooters in flat districts like the Essex marshes and many of our inland marsh districts, which are almost dead levels.

At the best, the common snipe is an eccentric bird. After all observation and the accumulated experience of years he sorely puzzles us. He is the very Bohemian of birds. "Here to-day and gone to-morrow" is his motto. Few can tell when he is coming and when he is going, or where he will for certain locate himself when he does come.

As regards the Essex marshes, it may be safely said that November is the best month for snipe; and then you must look for him by the side of his favourite "rants" and "fleets." Here he will generally be found in fair numbers, but not always, so capricious are his ways. One day I have found them in these *habitats* and nowhere else; on another sporadically distributed everywhere, and getting up under your feet in the most unlikely places; and on another—though it may seem the day of all others for their presence—nowhere. You might almost fancy they bury themselves under the mud or water, as a certain sage in Dr. Johnson's time alleged

that swallows did after they were tired of flying about in our English summer and autumn.

A variety of circumstances seem to determine their movements. They do not like wind or rain or frost. The last will drive every bird from the marshes, where the ditches are of stagnant water and there are no springs. Then they will seek the uplands on the very border of the marsh where open springs are to be found. Then they will particularly affect fields of turnips and green cover of the cabbage kind. I remember during a long frost a few years ago having excellent sport in a very large field of cabbages on the border of the Essex marshes, within twelve miles of Whitechapel. The birds had frequented the field for weeks, and seemed to have become strict vegetarians of necessity. Nothing would make them desert it; when driven out by sportsmen they, at least what remained of them, insisted on returning in a few hours to be shot at again.

I have often noticed, too, in my experience of the Essex marshes that you constantly find snipe within gunshot of some marshman's cottage, or marsh farm, as if they, after the fancy which hares are credited with, liked the proximity of human habitations, and delighted to hear the barking of a dog. I shall conclude this

paragraph with quoting Watt (not Dr. Watts of hymnal memory), who fairly enough versifies the vagaries of the snipe, though his lines may not be of any great practical use to the sportsman :—

The snipe is hardly ever found
In woods—he's fond of open ground ;
The rushy pond, the quiet brook,
But chiefly to the marshes look ;
The splashy heath, the boggy moor
Yield frequently an ample store :
Stick to them well when this the case is,
They very quickly change their places ;
To-day the sportsman can pursue
The numerous game "till all is blue,"
To morrow he goes out again
And mayn't a single shot obtain ;
Affected by the wind and weather,
They often flock away together.
Sometimes they to the hill repair,
Rising in wisps all wildly there ;
Vain the pursuit ; but if a gale
Should quickly from the east prevail,
Or even from the boisterous north,
Again you ought to sally forth.

And now "The Snipe, and How to Shoot him." Whole volumes have been written, and will be written, probably, on this topic till, in a highly refined and civilised age, when "sweetness and light" have done their beneficent work, there be no more cruel shooting or sport

of any kind, except that of worrying everybody who disagrees with you on subjects ecclesiastical, political, and social. But for the present, while there still lingers in our breast a very strong trace of the savage and sport-loving man, we shall shoot, or try to shoot, our snipe, insignificant little bird though he be.

More difficult than to find your snipe is to kill him when found. I hold that the prince of shots is the man who can make a certainty of a snipe—or, say, drop four out of five ; and he may rank as a "double first" who can be reckoned on to drop a couple right and left when he has a fair chance given him. You may call a snipe shot a "specialist," and snipe shooting a "knack," but, nevertheless, the man who can make fairly sure of his snipe is in the foremost rank of the knights of the trigger. Many a good shot on the moors at grouse, on the stubbles and among the turnips at partridges, in the coverts and at "warm corners" at pheasants, who can bowl over ninety-nine out of every 100 hares, and put a bullet into a stag to an inch at any reasonable distance, will often fail at snipe. Therefore, knack or no knack, specialist or not, let the crack snipe shot have the credit due to him. And "how does he do it?" Why, my dear friend and brother sportsman, he cannot tell you any more than I can. I

have not taken up my pen—I had almost said gun—to show you how to do it; or to give you infallible recipes for snipe shooting. I am not so stupid as to try. I am merely having a little friendly gossip with you, and putting a few "odds and ends" together on snipe and snipe shooting rather to amuse than instruct. Authors have as methodically prescribed rules for snipe shooting as authors or authoresses of cookery books have done for dealing with some intricate dish. But they vary considerably in the directions given. Some say, shoot directly your snipe rises; some, wait till he has finished his eccentric and zigzag movements when "feeling his wind;" some, don't shut either eye or bend the head to the stock of the gun; while others say, take deliberate aim in the old-fashioned way, and shoot well ahead. I don't profess to be a crack snipe shot, though I can account for a bird or two when I have the chance; but for the life of me I can't tell you in detail on what principle I deal with my snipe. When I drop him I can say in the trite and now proverbial words of the eminent Dr. Lynn, "That's how it's done," but beyond this I can hardly go. To be candid, when I drop the bird,

> Which with quick wing and zigzag flight
> Dazzles the unpractised fowler's sight,

I don't know how I've done it. Tho' from my earliest days a devoted snipe shooter, I must confess that no bird so unnerves me, comparatively speaking, as the innocent *scolopax*. A cock pheasant rising unexpectedly from dense covert with a mighty beating of pinions, which create a rattling noise resembling by no means feebly an average crash of thunder, acts as an opiate on me compared with the springing of a snipe. I still feel like a tyro at the sport, and thoroughly realise the words of the poet :

> So swift a bird is apt to make
> Young shots with indecision shake ;
> Such are indebted when they kill
> Much more to fortune than to skill.

I always have a kind of sensation that the bird has fallen more by luck than judgment.

Still I would venture to add a word or two of advice. The first is to the effect that if you wait to fire, as some instructors advise, till a snipe has done his zigzagging, in nine cases out of ten he will be out of shot before you have got your gun upon him. The next item of sententious advice is, don't follow anybody's instructions as to *how* to shoot at a snipe. "Shoot," I say, " in your own way, and after your own style." Depend upon it, if, after some little experience, and an honest endeavour,

with our own true sporting conscience, to discover "the reason why" you miss so often, you do not improve, then all the reading and all the oral advice in the world will never make you a good snipe shot. Still, again I would tender advice to this effect—as a general rule, when a snipe rises, accustom yourself to shoot quickly. I feel sure this is good advice. The traditional old gentleman, who is recorded, when a snipe rose and uttered its cry of (e) "scape," to have accustomed himself quickly to say, "I'll be hung if you do" (if he did not use more unparliamentary mutterings), and then deliberately to have taken a pinch of snuff, which he carried loose in his waistcoat pocket, before he fired, would be quite out of date now, for I cannot help thinking the education of snipe of the present day has been keeping pace with the improvement in our "arms of precision." I would, therefore, say, "shoot quickly;" adding, however, "but not in a hurry." There is a great difference between "quickness" and "hurry." Quickness, as far as my observation and experience goes, is essential to success, but still the snipe shooter must not be in a hurry or flurry.

One or two more jottings *re* snipe shooting, and I have done. Learned writers have spun out long disquisitions

from time to time as to the number of shot best for snipe shooting. Without wishing to appear to "lay down the law," I should say No. 8 is the best under all circumstances. No. 8 will knock over a moorhen—no mean bird for the table, if you only knew it—and is effectual against duck, teal, *et id genus omne*, up to 30yds. At 40yds. No. 5 or even No. 6 shot would not drop one snipe out of three, hold your gun never so correctly, for as the vulnerable parts of a departing snipe are not larger than a five shilling piece, the target is "not good enough," or in other words, the interstices between the shots will let your bird escape. No. 8 will not, of course, give as good penetration as No. 6, but the "pattern" or "target" ought to be 100 per cent. better. "Stonehenge," in "British Rural Sports," says that an ordinary 12-bore gun ought to put at least 130 pellets of No. 6 shot into a 30in. circle at 40yds. Now, in $1\frac{1}{8}$oz. of No. 6 shot there are about 315 pellets, while in the same weight of No. 8 there are about 675. Therefore, if 315 pellets give a pattern of 130, 675 pellets ought to give a pattern of 278, which would be a little more than 2 to 1 in favour of No. 8 as far as pattern goes. When intent on snipe on the Essex marshes, and indeed elsewhere, when larger game might be expected, my practice has

been since the advent of breechloaders to have in the right barrel a No. 8 cartridge, and in the left a No. 4 or 5. When I mark duck or teal, &c., of course I draw my No. 8, and substitute for it No. 4 or 5; and *vice versâ* when I have marked snipe or am beating some very favourite haunt of snipe. But after all, this charging your right and left barrels with cartridges of different numbers is a somewhat risky business. Even an old hand may get "dazed," and pull the wrong trigger in the excitement of the moment, even if he has not fallen into the lamentable error of putting the wrong cartridge into the right or left barrel, as the case may be. I have often thought that in working the Essex marshes, and similar districts, a kind of compromise would perhaps be best, and answer all reasonable purposes, viz., using No. 6 in both barrels. A good deal of mental anxiety would thus be avoided, and the bungling consequent thereon.

As a companion and canine help when snipe shooting, I like a dog. I am not about to plunge into the everlasting controversy as to whether a pointer or setter is the best animal for this sport. To be brief, then, but to run counter to the majority of sportsmen and controversialists, I prefer the pointer for snipe shooting, simply because, as a rule, he has a better nose than the setter.

It is all very well to say that a pointer cannot stand wet, and that in comparison with the setter it looks woebegone, and, as a sporting writer puts it, "unsightly at the end of a frosty day, when icicles are forming on her belly, her eyes are full of tears, and her unfortunate rudder has a crimson tip to it from continually whisking and rubbing against the reeds of the bog." This may do for descriptive writing, but I should like to know how icicles can form on a pointer's belly when the hair is not long enough to hold them, and where the poetical "tears in her eyes" come from, though I won't deny the pointer the possession of a lachrymal duct.

All I can say is that the best dog I ever had on the Essex marshes was a pointer, and he loved the scent of a snipe as dearly as he loved that of a partridge, and better, too. He seemed to know when I was bound for the snipe grounds, and I feel sure he anticipated olfactory pleasure accordingly. He could and would retrieve, too; and here let me note that on the Essex marshes, and on similar snipe ground, intersected with ditches, you must have something in the way of a retriever unless you can make up your mind to leave some of your slaughtered innocents behind you, or to make a détour, which will sometimes cost you half an hour, to bag them. You

cannot always cross a ditch, on the other side of which your snipe may have fallen, even with the help of a pole, and sometimes your bird may have fallen into a "fleet" or into a reed shore. In the latter case it is often "good bye," even when you have a good retriever at your behest.

I should say, then, that a good pointer is the best dog to find your snipe, and a good retriever to bring them to you when killed—not a wild brute, at whom you must be always whistling and shouting as he dashes in at anything or nothing, and does ten times more harm than good, but your very humble and obedient servant to whom a "nod is as good as wink," and both better than whistle or whip. From a long experience in all kinds of shooting, I am convinced that, in nineteen cases out of twenty, the bag at the end of a day is less than it would have been but for the "dawgs." I don't know how it is, but dogs of the present day do not seem to know their business; I can, however, make a shrewd guess that the fault is with their trainers, and with the men who shoot over them. A dog you use for snipe, be he setter or pointer, should be perfectly cognisant of the work he is wanted for. When you get such a dog, your day's sport is heightened any number of degrees. Some

persons say that in snipe shooting you are more on the *qui vive* without a dog than with one, and better perpared for a quick shot. Perhaps so; but I hold that a genuine lover of the gun is a genuine lover of the dog; and—in my opinion, or rather according to my feelings—to shoot a snipe or any other bird over an intelligent dog is a tenfold more satisfactory sensation than to shoot a dozen without one. Here, then, though I could descant on this topic *ad infinitum,* let the dog question rest.

A word or two as to the scientific method of beating for snipe. You cannot always beat for your game of any kind *secundum artem;* and it often happens that the direction of the wind and geographical exigencies and other factors in our calculations prevent us doing as we would. So with beating for snipe; but as a rule let snipe shooters if possible first work their ground, but not very closely, *down* wind—for the simple reason that snipe on being sprung generally try to fly *up* wind, and so pass to the right or left of the gun within fair range. When doing this keep your dog (and I am presuming that your snipe dog is under perfect command) at your heels. Afterwards walk the same ground *up* wind and let your dog range. Here I know I am at direct variance with as great an authority as "Stonehenge,"

but I cannot help it. A man is worth nothing if he has not his own opinion, and one of the great charms of our field sports is that they offer so many open questions, on which brother sportsmen may differ, and yet be good friends. If you can walk *down* wind with your dog (as "Stonehenge" suggests) and keep him to leeward of your beat, all very well, but where can you get one dog in fifty to do this? I must confess that I cannot quite follow the learned "Stonehenge" in his directions for beating for snipe. As regards the Essex Marshes, and similar districts intersected with ditches, all I know is that you must to a very great extent take the country as you find it, and make the best of it, unless you are prepared to make "circumbendibus" after "circumbendibus," with an infinite loss of time, to get your wind right.

A word or two to young sportsmen about marking snipe. It is always worth while to try and do this, for the bird has a strong tendency to come back very near to the locality where he was flushed. After his zig-zaggings and other aërial eccentricities he often rises upwards till he looks but a speck against the heavens, and he seems to have said good-bye to you for the day. Indeed, he frequently ranges away quite out of sight of

the naked eye ; but often, if you can follow him, you will see him at last begin circling round and round in jerky rings, which gradually descend lower and lower, until at last he drops plump like a stone upon a spot which is not far distant and which you may mark almost to a hair's breadth. Gisborne has some pretty lines anent the flight of the snipe :

> The snipe flies screaming from the marshy verge,
> And towers in airy circles o'er the wood,
> Still heard at intervals ; and oft returns
> And stoops as bent to alight ; then wheels aloft
> With sudden fear, and screams and stoops again,
> Her favourite glade reluctant to forsake.

This, of course, is truer of the snipe in some districts than others, especially where a country is rough and semi-enclosed, but in an open district, like the Essex Marshes or an Irish bog, it is not often a snipe is balked in his resolve to alight on *terra firma*. You may often mark him, as I have said, to a hair's breadth, on the Essex Marshes, for instance, by a cattle pound or cattle post or by a bank of reeds, or by the cattle grazing on the marsh—for on this rich gramineous expanse of Essex cattle graze all the winter. But as you shift your position to get to the desired spot the difficulty is to keep your eye on it. You require a good deal of practice

in this kind of marking before you can attain anything approaching infallibility. In snipe shooting on the Essex Marshes and elsewhere I always carry an opera glass, ready focussed, in a side pocket, and directly after a bird gets up out of shot, or I miss one, I follow it, and am thus enabled to keep a bird in sight till it comes towards me again, which I should not have been able to do with the naked eye. I hope no one will put me down for a genuine Cockney sportsman for this admission. There is really no more reason why glasses should not be used by snipe shooters on the Essex Marshes than in the forests of the far north by the deerstalking aristocracy and plutocracy.

Another word of advice. When you are expecting to flush birds look to your footing. Keep one eye ranging a little upwards and forwards, so that you see your bird the moment he rises, and the other on the ground immediately before you, so that you may anticipate as far as possible the nature of the spot you are about to set your foot on, and be ready for emergencies. It is vexatious beyond measure just when you ought to be raising your gun to your shoulder to find yourself sinking knee deep in any soft ground or stumbling over a little hillock of harder geological structure than its surround-

ings. But you may say that this kind of separate use of the eyes is next to impossible. Really, it is not so. It is, like so many other things, a matter of practice. And even without practice you will find that it is no very difficult matter, when sitting in one corner of a room, to look diagonally into the right and left corners at the same time. Indeed, after a few walks over snipe ground you come to use your eyes in the way I have mentioned almost naturally, but still it is worth while to try and educate yourself to it at the same time. Snipe shooting, as has humorously been said, is not as dangerous, generally speaking, as tiger hunting or tackling a "rogue" elephant, and it is seldom your quarry turns upon you like a mad bull or a python, but it has its dangers on certain grounds. On some Irish bogs, and on Dartmoor, where I have had no little snipe-shooting experience, you are never sure that you may not be suddenly involved in a remarkably unpleasant, if not actually very dangerous predicament. The quaking foothold of black slime may possibly give way below your boots in a gradually widening chasm which threatens to swallow you, or you may find that you have slid into a slippery-sided "moss-pot," and are floundering in a compost of the consistency of pea soup

with nothing more buoyant to cling to than your breech-loader.

Snipism, like other "isms," has its technology. We never speak of a "brace," but of a "couple" of snipe. It is not a "covey," or "flight," or "congregation," but a "wisp" or "walk" of snipe; "wisp" being an old term for "bundle" (as we still say a "wisp" of straw), and "walk" probably meaning originally the haunt (just as we now speak of a "walk" for young hounds and for poultry), but afterwards transferred to the "haunters." When a snipe screams or utters its cry, the strict term is "skirl." I once read, somewhere or other, of a wisp of snipe "bursting." I thank you, good author, for that word—I have seen a wisp "burst" like a shell. It was in a water meadow near Bovey Heathfield, in Devonshire. It was a November day, and in the aforesaid meadow I flushed at least 150 snipe—speaking moderately, with the story of the cats on the grass plot in my mind. They got up in "wisps" from ten to twenty at a time; the "wisps" really "bursting," and the feathered fragments of the *Scolopaciadal* shells flying in all directions.

Gastronomically, I confess I am a snipe enthusiast. As a sportsman, I would sooner bag a snipe than any other

game bird; as an admirer of animated nature, I admire the snipe above all birds; as a gastronomist, I think the snipe the most toothsome morsel in creation. I will not say that I am "a *gourmet* first and a sportsman afterwards;" but I look on no fish, flesh, or fowl to be compared with a snipe properly done on toast, with all his appurtenances, barring his feathers and the gizzard and duct, which latter a skilful *chef* knows how to extract without disturbing the rest of his internal economy. But it must be properly done—that is, not too much and not too little. It is a waste of a good thing to toast a snipe to a cinder; it is a mere foolish fashion (like that of putting the *large* end of a cheroot into the mouth) to pretend to like it half raw, "just carried through the kitchen." There is a *juste milieu* in cooking a snipe, as in everything else. It is evident that Nature intended him to be served on toast, which receives and conserves the subtle essences and flavours which exude from his body beneath the heat. I do not mean that the only way to eat a snipe is on toast, though this beats all others; for it must be acknowledged that our little dickeybird served in the form of snipe pudding (*pouding de becassine*) is nearly all that poor humanity can desire. Good reader, if you happen to know a "Fishmonger"—

not the tradesman who deals in fish, and to whom haply but unhappily you may owe a little bill, but a member of the ancient Guild of Fishmongers—and if ever he invites you to dine with him at the historic hall hard by London Bridge during the season when snipe are "in," don't refuse him, for you will probably have a chance of partaking of *pouding de becassine*, a lot which does not often fall to ordinary mortals. What, however, is most strongly to be insisted on, is that, contrary to accepted notions, a snipe (like other creatures, to be eaten with their trail) is never better than when eaten on the day he is killed. All the exquisite flavour of the trail is then in him, but it is evanescent, and if a day or two passes it gradually fades away, and then you must wait till a process of natural decomposition sets in, in order to get a gamey flavour. The story I have told of a highly educated *gourmet* anent woodcock is also told of one anent snipe. He used to keep his snipe till the flesh was quite tender, and then introduce into its body the trail of fresh-killed bird, just before the original was cooked. Verily he was a philosopher of the table!

It is said that all things pall upon the appetite if we have too much of them. *Toujours perdrix* is a proverb. There are several things, which, to lovers of

them, can never pale—oysters, mushrooms, olives, and above all, snipe. By way of a postscript let me add that there is no *morceau* that brings out the true flavour of good Bordeaux or Bungundy so well as snipe does. Let him who takes white wine with snipe, or, indeed, with any brown flesh, be accounted a heathen.

ROOKS.

ROOK SHOOTING.

ROOKS.

THE only reason, or rather excuse, I can offer for introducing Rooks into "Notes on Game and Game Shooting" is that, at a certain season of the year, rook shooting is a definitely recognised and widely popular branch of sport with the gun.

Few birds have received more attention from naturalists than the rook, as Gilbert White's "Natural History of Selborne" and many similar works testify; and, indeed, it would not be very difficult to write a volume of considerable length on the habits and peculiarities of this interesting member of the *Corvidæ* family, whose praises have been sung by Warton, Leigh Hunt, and Charles Lamb, and, indeed, by the great majority of English poets. A grand, proud-looking bird is the rook, and when he is in full plumage his blue-black feathers have a richer gloss

over them than is the case with any other English bird. So highly polished, if the expression be an admissible one, are they that at certain angles the rays of the sun will glance from them and slightly dazzle the human eye. Structurally, the rook has several interesting features. He has, for instance, a kind of pouch below the lower mandible or chin, which he can use like a monkey does his cheek for storing food, and which he actually does use for this purpose, carrying home in it food for his young family. He has a curious, scabbard-like arrangement into which he withdraws his tongue when not using it. At the base of his bill he has a strange rough skin, which in his early youth is covered with feathers. These fall off naturally before he is six months old, and are not worn off, as used to be thought, by his digging his beak into the ground; but why they should ever have been there is still a puzzle to ornithologists. The organs of smelling in a rook are very highly developed, and he has a very large brain, both which facts will account in a great measure for the undoubtedly superior intelligence with which the bird is endowed.

The Rook and the Crow both belong to the same family, the *Corvidæ* (order of *Passeres*, and Tribe of *Conirostres*); but beyond the fact that they are both black and nearly

of a size, the crow being a trifle the smaller of the two, they have very little indeed in common. The crow, *Corvus corone* (*Κορώνε*), so called because of his *curved* beak, is a solitary bird; not so solitary, indeed, as that most solitary of creatures the solitary snipe, but more than a pair of crows—which, by the way, remain husband and wife till death doth them part—are never seen together. The rook, on the other hand, is essentially gregarious; but perhaps he cannot be credited with the same amount of conjugal fidelity as the crow, though it is certain that many pairs of rooks remain coupled for years. Again, the rook, as his name, *Corvus frugilegus*, implies, is a "fruit-eater," or, as some render the word, a "corn-gatherer," while the crow is a devourer of meat or flesh, and that not always of the most refined kind, as the unenviable prefix of "carrion" implies. To be ornithologically correct, however, it should be added that the rook does not confine his diet strictly to "corn," seeds, or fruit. He is not an absolute vegetarian; indeed, far from it, for he spends no slight portion of his time in entomological researches, converting a variety of living creatures which crawl on the earth or under it into food. His love for the common earth-worm can be seen from the persistent manner in which he attends the plough-

man's work and picks up the wriggling inches of flesh as they are exposed to the daylight. On the sea coast he will eat cockles and mussels when he can get them. He delights in grubs of all kinds, having a special liking for the larvæ of the cockchafer and the tipulas or daddy-longlegs. But his most favourite *bonne bouche* is the wireworm. *Per contra*, I must credit the crow with some more delicate tastes than are generally attributed to him, for though he prefers animal food, and that "high," and though it is written of him,

> Like a lawyer, he grubbeth, no matter what way,
> The fouler the offal, the richer the prey,

yet still he will eat insects, fresh and all alive o', and even tender fruit, like his cousin the rook. However, it is not to be tolerated that the homely, socialable, and honest rook should be confounded with his sable congener, the crow, with whom he has no real fellowship, and who with his mate will often visit a small rookery, and, despite the efforts of its joint proprietors, destroy more than half the eggs before they can be driven off. The only excuse for calling a rook a crow is that in some country districts the latter name seems to stand for both members of the *Corvidæ* family. Hence, perhaps, the Poet Laureate, whose allusions to ornithological and

botanical matters have more than once given rise to considerable discussion, may be excused for writing in "Locksley Hall" of

> The many winter'd *crow*, that leads the clanging *rookery* home,

especially as he passed a great portion of his earlier life in Lincolnshire, where, I am told, the term "crow" is generally used for both birds. Of course, he is inexcusable if perchance he has an idea that a rook, after a certain number of summers or winters, becomes a "crow;" just as jack, according to a now almost obsolete phraseology, became a "pike" after attaining a certain weight. But whatever excuses may be made for the poet or humbler men, the confusion of names in natural history should be discountenanced. A rook ought no more to be called a crow, or *vice versâ*, than either ought to be called a raven or a jackdaw. The word "rook" is found in various forms in many European languages, and is probably connected with the old Saxon word *rouca*, "chattering." Thus the name may be considered a case of onomatopœia.

Rooks seem to have enjoyed but ill repute in former days, as Wycherley calls a rapacious fellow and cheat "a rook," and Milton speaks of "a band of rooking

officials." Even at the present time "rooking" is a synonym for cheating.

Here perhaps I had better face the question as to whether rooks should be destroyed, in consequence of the damage it is alleged they do to the crops. The controversy breaks out periodically, and the farming community seems to suffer from periodical fits of rook destruction and rook preservation, though more frequently from the former. It would appear that the "Poisoned Grain Prohibition Act" of 1863, which was intended to protect birds generally from wholesale destruction by laying down poisoned corn, is inoperative for the protection of rooks, for the 4th section permits the application of any solution or dressing for protection of grain "for *bonâ fide* use in agriculture." And thus it comes to pass that if any one farmer in a district entertains a prejudice against the poor rooks he can indulge with *malice prepense* in poisoning them by scores and hundreds. I say the "poor" rooks, for, though the question in one sense is an open one, I am as fully persuaded as it is possible for one to be in a matter of opinion that the rooks do twentyfold more good than harm to the farmer. Admitted that they get a little of the seed corn and destroy some of the growing roots,

and work out and devour some of the potato settings, yet, depend upon it, they rootle the earth about more for the purpose of finding the deadly wireworm and a variety of grubs than of procuring seed or tubers for food. The rooks, too, may root up a little grass in our pastures; but what of that if, as is the fact, they do so for the purpose of getting at the wireworm, which nips the roots of grass and destroys the herbage? A good supply of rich milk depends on good grass, and good grass is much indebted to the rook. They eat the turnip grub also; and if even the dreaded Colorado beetle makes his appearance in our potato fields it will be to the rooks more than to any other agency that we shall have to look for deliverance. Abolish rooks, and you abolish a real friend to the farmer, as not very long ago some pig-headed agriculturists found to their cost in a certain district of an English county. They actually exterminated the poor birds by foul means, and then year after year their crops more or less failed. At last, the true cause of failure suggested itself, or, as I had better say, was suggested to these wiseacres, and they partly redeemed their folly by reimporting and rehabilitating their benefactors. What if the rooks are disposed to take a few seeds, or shell a few peas, or take tribute, as they occasionally will, of

cherry, pear, and walnut trees?—there is no great difficulty or expense in protecting fields or gardens for a week or two at certain periods of the year. A boy can be got for this purpose for a few pence per day, and no bird is so easily "kept"—an ellipse, as the country people have it, for "kept off"—as the rook. And what if occasionally an ill-conducted member of the community taps the egg of a game bird, or even molests very young game?—for this is alleged against our friend. Egg and young bird destruction is certainly not a habit of the tribe, if, indeed, the charge can be substantiated in some few instances, which I am almost inclined to doubt.

The good that rooks do is so immeasurably greater than the harm that they are certainly entitled to protection both at the hands of the farmer and of the game preserver. If there were any real doubt about this, a series of examinations of the contents of the crops and stomachs of a large number of rooks obtained for the purpose, and scientifically conducted during twelve consecutive months a few years ago, settled the question in favour of the birds.

I have nothing to say on behalf of the crow. He is not a bird to be loved, admired, or protected. He does no good in his generation, for we have not enough carrion

or offal lying about our fields or home premises to make him a useful scavenger, as are certain birds in Eastern countries. His solitary habits, his gastronomic proclivities, and his particularly disagreeable "caw" are repellant; while his love of eggs, and strong tendency to snap up young chicken and ducklings, young partridges and pheasants, or even young rabbits and leverets, naturally cause him to be classed among "vermin" by the sporting community, and to be treated "with the utmost rigour of the law." Notwithstanding the modern theory that vermin have their place and work in the "balance of nature," and do actual good by destroying the diseased and decaying members of the game world, the skeleton of our *Corvus corone* is still likely for many a day to come to bleach on a barn door or the branch of a tree, as a terror to evil doers and a testimony to the keeper's vigilance.

But this is somewhat of a digression, and I will at once return to the rook and his interesting habits. He is pre-eminently a social bird, and loves to domicile near the habitations of man, though occasionaly we may find rookeries far from "busy haunts." I know several such on the borders of the Essex marshes. I have one in my eye specially. It is in the parish of Corringham, and in

a row of low stunted elm trees in a hedgerow which divides the marsh from the uplands. It is some distance from any human habitation, and in an exposed place; and I have often wondered what could induce a colony to inhabit such an inhospitable spot. Perhaps there is some long-standing Corvidal tradition connected with it. Still, it is not often that a rookery is found at any great distance from a house, especially if it be a small rookery. Rooks seem to like nesting (as a hare is said to like to "form") within sound of the barking of a dog. They seem to like even the smoke from chimneys. The old established rookeries appear to throw off colonies from time to time, but the colonists are very capricious as to their choice of a new home. It is one of the hardest things in the world to establish a rookery, or to get rooks to build in particular trees, or clumps of trees, where you would like them to build. Various have been the devices resorted to for attracting and establishing them; and when all have failed, the building of a little hut below certain trees has effected the purpose, and thus afforded another illustration of the love of rooks to be near human habitation. And when they have settled on a particular locality, or on a special tree, or clump of trees, it is almost as difficult to oust them from it as to

get them there at first. I had a small rookery—a yearly average of about twenty-five nests—in the grounds near my house when I lived in Hertfordshire. There was a large number of trees, all equally well suited, as one would have thought, for the birds, but they confined themselves generally to some half a dozen, of which two were their special favourites. Unfortunately, they were just the two trees in which I did not wish them to build. One was just outside the conservatory door, and partly overhung the glass, and as during the building time the birds dropped a quantity of sticks about, and were otherwise a great nuisance, I determined to make them forsake the tree. But putting a scarecrow in it, frightening and annoying them in a variety of ways, and even destroying their nests, had no effect. I therefore, much against my will, had recourse to my gun; but it was not till I had repeatedly run out of the conservatory and fired that I effected my object. The other tree was in a field opposite the drawing-room windows—one of the handsomest elms I ever saw, and symmetrically conical in shape. The top of this the rooks were gradually disfiguring, breaking off the shoots, as is their habit, to supply materials for their nests, and making it bare of leaves in the summer. Eventually I was in this

case also obliged to employ the gun; for such was the impudence and persistency of the birds that they not only laughed to scorn a large and well made though terrible-looking scarecrow, which I had placed in the tree, but a pair of them worked away on its body like the vultures on that of Tityrus, till they effected a large hole in it, and actually incorporated their nest with it, using some of the stuffing of the figure for that purpose.

The tenacity with which they cling to their old dwellings, as well as their sociability, may account for rooks still building in some of the most densely populated districts of London—for instance, in the gardens of Gray's Inn and Bethlehem Hospital, in the Marylebone-road, and elsewhere.

I have noticed that, except during the actual time when the rooks have young in their nests, the tenants of small colonies do not often roost there at night, but retire to the parent rookery and return again in the morning. And what an early return it is, and what early risers they are! Next to the lark, which mounts into the sky during the dim twilight, the earliest of all birds is the rook. He begins his caw about dawn; and what a nuisance he is if you have a rookery near your bedroom windows and sleep with them open, unless you have got used to the

hoarse music—as bad as a nightingale just under your window when you are wakeful and fidgety. When the rooks are in a quarrelsome humour, which is often the case in the nestmaking time, matters are worse, for the cawings and objurgations are redoubled, as they try to steal the materials of one another's nests or defend their own, or the majority of the community set upon the constructed edifice of one unhappy pair who somehow have given dire offence. I am sorry to record this against my friends. It is the worst feature in their generally amiable characters, and evinces a very distressing mental obliquity as to the principles of *meum* and *tuum*.

To set against this is the credit due to the rook of having true sympathy for a companion in distress. When a rook is shot it will often be noticed that instead of the rest being scared away, and leaving their companion to his fate, they show the greatest anxiety, utter cries of evident distress, and hover over him, sometimes swooping down close to him, as if to assure themselves of the cause of his lingering. When a bird is only wounded and can flutter a little way on the ground, a sympathiser is sure to be near him, and will seem to try and animate him to fresh exertions by flying a little distance in front of him.

It may perhaps interest some of my readers if here I enlarge somewhat on Rook-life in London, to which I have alluded just above.

There are three species of birds which are familiar to a Londoner in his daily life, namely, London sparrows, London pigeons, and London rooks. The first-named bird is so common and ubiquitous, haunting our dwellings all the year round, and in the breeding season making his nest in our garden trees and house spouts —often to our discomfiture—that he attracts but little interest, and we almost are led to think that his natural home is among the dwellings of man, as perhaps it really is. The London pigeon—I do not mean the domesticated dweller in dovecotes of man's construction, the proprietors of which, especially out East-end way, seem to spend the greater part of their Sunday mornings flying and feeding their birds, but the semi-wild and mixed-bred *columba* which, owned by no man, unless it be the proprietors of the buildings, frequents the Royal Exchange, the Guildhall, the Houses of Parliament, and similar edifices—the London pigeon (to catch up my nominative case after a long parenthesis) is a more interesting bird, as he shows a quiet confidence in man, without the impudence of the sparrow coupled with fear.

But still more interesting is the London rook. Though we specially associate the rook with the country, even there, as I have said, he shows a partiality for making his home, generally speaking, close to the bricks and mortar of man's dwellings, and seems to like the smoke of the domestic hearth to rise up among his domiciles. But it does seem strange indeed that he should affect our great metropolis, with its teeming population of four millions or more, equalling almost that of the whole of Scotland, and be by no means adverse to forming colonies in trees which are situate in the densest parts of it. But so it is. In almost every quarter of the metropolis rooks are to be found in larger or smaller communities, and, notwithstanding the wondrous increase of buildings and population during (say) the last quarter of a century, the number of these birds which make their nests in our midst has rather increased than decreased. I am somewhat at a loss to account for this ornithological phenomenon ; but perhaps it may be based on the strong feelings of association and tenacity of affection for "the old house at home" which rooks have beyond all other birds. It is possible, nay, probable, that some of the clumps of few trees, and even single trees, in which London rooks still build, are all that now

remain of what were once considerably larger plantations, where extensive rookeries existed for many corvine generations, and that the descendants of former occupants are still clinging to the old attenuated haunts, even though they may be reduced to one, two, or three trees by the invasion of successive generations of enterprising builders. But be this as it may, I am at present concerned rather with facts than theories, and my present business is to make a few jottings anent existing rookeries in our metropolis and the habits of their tenants.

I cannot take upon myself to say exactly how many rookeries are now existing within the ten miles radius or within that of the old "Bills of Mortality," though I have been a most interested observer of London rooks for many years, but there are many more than mere casual observers would think. Of course, the rooks still hold their sporadic tenements in our larger parks—Hyde Park and Regent's Park, for instance. There is a small colony in the Marylebone-road, at the end of Portland-place, which numbers generally from half a dozen to a dozen nests. The trees in the vicinity of "Bedlam" have their rooks; and, more southward, Denmark-hill has its rookeries. There are rooks near

University College, at the north end of Gower-street, the rookery being established or augmented there as recently as the year 1875. At the angle between the bottom of Haverstock-hill and the Adelaide-road there is a little colony, which in 1879 I observed consisted of five nests, close to the roadways, and not many yards from the chimney-tops of the house at the angle of the roads aforesaid. Till the same year there had been for a long time a small rookery in the trees near Hereford-square, Old Brompton, but in the spring of 1879 they were deserted, much to the regret of dwellers in the vicinity, owing, probably, to the building operations going on in the neighbourhood. The rooks in the Temple Gardens have long been sacred birds, and probably no better account of them and their habits will ever be written than that given in his "Animated Nature" by poor old "Noll" Goldsmith, who, from his upper windows in Garden-court, so often watched their ways and works. Not very many years ago there were rooks' nests annually in the most crowded thoroughfare of London, in the very heart of the City, Cheapside, in the umbrageous plane tree almost opposite Bow Church. High buildings of many stories have risen up round it on all sides but one, and that fronting the main thorough-

fare, where the little low shops still nestle under it, and one is entitled "Under the Tree." I do not know who may be the owner of these tenements, or who is the ground landlord, but when I pass the spot I like to think that it is someone or "someones" who reverence the tree, and will not cut it down or build it out with bricks and mortar "for filthy lucre's sake," and rob the passers-by in their long continuous stream of this "little bit of greenery." In this solitary tree the number of nests gradually diminished, till at last only a pair of rooks annually built their home, or rather reconstructed the old one, and reared their young season after season. But some ten years ago a wretched clerk in a neighbouring warehouse, from a top window which commanded the nest, thought fit to exercise his idiotic skill at firing with a pistol or pea rifle at the old or young birds. By an accident (I suppose it must have been) he hit one, and from that day the Cheapside plane tree was deserted by the rooks, at least for nesting purposes. Occasionally one or two of the sable tribe have been seen on a temporary visit; but the pushing London sparrow, or rather sparrows, installed themselves in the vacant tenement and used it for their own purposes till within two years ago, when the fabric came to pieces altogether

and disappeared; and thus it has come to pass that there can be no longer seen a rook's nest in the most crowded street of all London.

But by far the most interesting colony of metropolitan rooks is that in Gray's Inn Gardens, Holborn, a veritable *rus in urbe.* It is in the very heart of one of the most densely-populated districts of the metropolis, and perhaps one of the most foggy and smoky we can boast. Gray's Inn Gardens, which cover about two acres, hemmed in on all sides by bricks and mortar, were originally laid out in 1597 under the direction of the famous Lord Bacon, the then treasurer of the society; and there is still preserved on the north-west side of the grounds a catalpa tree, which tradition says was planted by him. It is now in a parlous state, and requires constant attention and propping up to keep it going. Bacon evidently took great delight in these gardens, and there is an order of pension extant in the following terms:—"July 4, 1597. Ordered that the summe of £7 15s. 4d. due to Mr. Bacon, for planting of elm trees in the walks, be paid next term." And in the following year there was an order made for the supply of more young elms, &c., the cost of which, "as appeared by Mr. Bacon's account," was £60 6s. 8d. The gardens,

or "walks," as they were originally called, soon became a fashionable place of resort, as may be gathered from Howell's "Familiar Letters" and Pepys' "Diary." The former, writing to a friend in an inn in 1621, says: "I hold your walks to be the pleasantest place about London, and that you have there the choicest society." The latter must have often visited them. Here are a couple of extracts from the immortal "Diary:"—"4th May, 1662. When church was done, my wife and I walked to Graye's Inn, to observe fashions of the ladies, because of my wife's making some clothes." And "17 August, 1622. I was very well pleased with the sight of a fine lady that I have often seen walk in Graye's Inn Walks." Addison, in the "Spectator," mentioned Sir Roger de Coverley walking on the terrace in Gray's Inn Garden, "humming twice or thrice to himself with great vigour, for he loves to clear his pipes in good air." Charles Lamb, in "Essays of Elia," gives an interesting description of the gardens, and laments the encroachment of "the accursed Verulam Buildings" on the east side, adding that "Bacon has left the impress of his foot upon these gravel walks."

But as the planter of a walnut tree is said never to live to gather fruit from it (though, by the way, this is not

true), so Bacon did not live to see rooks build in his elms. I have not been able to ascertain when the first nests were made, but, as far as I can gather, the establishment of the rook colony is of comparatively recent date. I am told that the rooks came to the gardens about twenty to twenty-five years ago one spring, when a number of trees at the Spring Gardens corner of St. James's Park about which they built were felled. There is nothing which rooks more resent than the felling of timber in the vicinity of their domiciles. *Proximus ardet Ucalegon;* and naturally they argue that their own special trees are doomed for the axe. However, at the period I have mentioned there were generally about twenty-five nests each season, and about this number was annually kept up. In 1875 several trees were cut down in the gardens late in March and early in April, at which the birds took umbrage, and for a time left. The majority, I am told, established themselves in the trees at the north end of Gower-street, a small rookery already mentioned; but about six pairs returned to Gray's Inn at the latter end of April and bred.

In the following year they were again disturbed, and only six or eight pairs nested. Since then matters have improved, and there were a dozen nests in 1877; in 1878

there were twenty-three; and in 1879 they numbered a round score. Almost all the nests are in the plane trees, and not in the elms. The birds generally begin to build about the 1st of March—a little later, I fancy, than country rooks. During the breeding season the Gray's Inn rooks, like those of other metropolitan colonies, remain all day and all night at their homes, but are absent for the most part during the winter months, when doubtless they take up their abode at the parent rookery, or one to which they have attached themselves, probably on the outskirts of the metropolis. Even in the country, generally speaking, the rooks do not remain during the winter at the small rookeries, but betake themselves to the larger ones whence they originally came. This was the case with the birds of my small corvine colony of some twenty or thirty nests in Hertfordshire. In the winter they only paid flying visits by day, and as the spring drew on seemed to busy themselves for an hour or two in repairing the old nests. This is the habit of the London birds. At Gray's Inn during the winter they pay almost daily visits to the gardens, coming about daylight in the morning, and leaving for some head-quarters rookery northwards between two and three in the afternoon.

The Gray's Inn rooks are looked upon almost as sacred birds. The steward of the society, an old friend of mine, and hailing from broad-acred Lincolnshire, where rooks do most abound, the benchers, and last but not least Mr. Scriven, the gardener, take a great interest in them, as do the occupants of the chambers looking into the gardens, and, indeed, all persons connected with the historic inn. Mr. Scriven keeps a supply of fresh water always ready for their use; but they decline the soaked horse-beans which he has offered them. The truth is, they are well provided for by the occupants of the chambers, the highest of which look down into their nests. All kinds of odds and ends from the breakfast, dinner, and supper tables are thrown out to them, and so the birds have no need to go into the country in search of food. A most varied bill of fare do these favoured birds enjoy, and they are hence an omnivorous race. They specially delight in the poultry and other bones thrown to them, which they carry up into the plane trees, and, placing one foot on them, pick them as clean as if they had been bleached for years. Thus the Gray's Inn rooks are decidedly carnivorous as well as frugivorous. But in return for all the kindness shown them they almost worry Mr. Scriven's life out of

him by rooting up the grass with their powerful beaks, doubtless in search of worms. He is therefore obliged from time to time to run string along the edges of the turf and over the bald spots which he has repaired. The rooks know him and his assistant well, and allow them to approach within a few yards of them. They resent, however, the presence of a stranger in the gardens, and the colony signifies the same by a general chorus of objurgating cawing. Feeding with the rooks may often be seen in the gardens their special friends, the jackdaws and starlings, who share the good things of this life with them—I hope with thankfulness.

I now come to Rook shooting. Many lovers of the gun, who have to put their weapons aside at the close of the legitimate shooting season, and to wait many weary weeks before the campaign opens again against the grouse and partridges, are glad to take advantage of a few days' rook shooting towards the end of May, when the young birds are well out of their nests, and not a few of them pretty strong on the wing. They like to feel once more the cold iron and the polished walnut stock, and manipulate again the familiar hammer and trigger, the very sensation of holding "arms of precision" being a pleasurable one; and hence there is little

difficulty in filling up the ranks of a rook-shooting party, though the majority of its members are quite conscious that the murderous work to be engaged in is nothing very grand in the way of sport. They join in it, as I have said, for the pleasure of handling a gun again, or because they have nothing better to do in the country on a May morning; just as at the same season, for want of a better fowl, many of the dealers' shops in Leadenhall Market and elsewhere are black with the results of May battues. Indeed, the sooty rows or heaps of wretched rooklings—and what more wretched looking than dead, scurfy young rooks?—are hardly suggestive of a pastime worthy of the name of sport, but rather of the dire dismay and distress the guns have been causing in many a once happy colony in the tall elms. Rooks are amongst the most affectionate of birds towards their nestlings, and take more pains than most other birds in giving lessons in hopping and the use of their wings to their young progeny, and hence their wild grief and distress on a day's rook shooting. Any one who has read the description in the "Agamemnon" of Æschylus, of the eagles wheeling in aërial circles and uttering piercing cries, while their nest is being despoiled of its young, cannot fail to be reminded of it as he sees and

hears the parent rooks, high up in mid air, cawing forth their hoarse wailings at the bloody work going on below. I think it is the memory of these days of terrible slaughter which makes the old birds, and the young ones which escape, so marvellously shy of the sight of a gun for the remainder of the term of their natural lives ; at all events, it is a more reasonable explanation of the very keen perception a rook undoubtedly has for a fowling piece, and of the dread even of a walking stick raised to the shoulder (at least on all other days of the week except Sunday, when it is said the bird knows that Christian people are not in the habit of shooting), than the popular belief that rooks can smell powder.

Rook shooting, I hold, is a legitimate recreation for a day or two in the season, and there is a certain amount of amusement to be got out of it ; but it is not sport in any high acceptation of the word. It has hardly an element of true sport. It does not call into play a man's muscle or powers of endurance, or tend to cultivate the talent of observation, or educe the sporting virtues of patience and perseverance. Anyone who can lay his eye along the barrel of a gun can let fly an ounce or more of shot at the motionless object of a young rook's dusky carcase with pretty sure effect. A modern authority on

guns and shooting says anent rook-shooting: "No one dreams of shooting these birds sitting within shot, because they present such easy marks as to make it butchery rather than sport." The sentiment which prompted this remark is commendable enough, but it is hardly in accordance with facts. I fancy that nine out of every ten birds which find their way into Leadenhall Market, or into a pie made in their native village without the intervention of "the trade," are potted sitting and die ignominiously riddled with shot. It was all very well to take a pot shot at a rookery in the olden days when the best weapon to be had was a cross-bow, or with a "bolt-bow," or bow and arrow, with which weapons Blaine tells us that rookeries used formerly to be "assailed." And, even now, the use of an air-cane, or one of those exquisitely made little toys, pea-rifles, many of which are now manufactured especially for rook-shooting, is legitimate enough as an exercise of skill which seeks a living rather than a dead object for its mark. On no reasonable ground can rook-shooting with such weapon be objected to; but dropping young rooks, which cannot fly a yard and have not the sense to keep hopping about, with an ordinary shot gun as they sit stupidly on the branches of the trees, is but tame work, and will always

come in for a large share of condemnation both from sportsmen and non-sportsmen. I was much amused the other day at seeing in the columns of a well-known sporting paper an advertisement of shot guns for rook-shooting, illustrated with the cutting of a young bird, very miserable in appearance, as if conscious of coming evil, perched on the branch of a tree, black as ink, with the exception of nine round white holes, about the size of pins' heads, well "patterned" over, or rather through the vital parts of his corvine frame, and indicative of the daylight which the advertised guns would let into it. So irresistibly comical was this illustration, and painful withal, that now, when I think of it, I am almost inclined to withdraw my qualified approval of a day's rook shooting.

Some members of a rook-shooting party will tell you that they never shoot at "branchers" or stationary birds, but only as the flyers make short expeditions from tree to tree. Their forbearance is to be admired in the abstract, though it may be doubted whether their practice always agrees with their theory. I fear your sportsman as a rule loves blood, or at least death, and among rook shooters there is an inevitable tendency to "count one" when they can, regardless of the higher views of sport.

By the way, if rook shooters really wish only to deal with these birds when on the wing, the best plan is to defer the shooting till the young birds are old enough to leave the rookery for outlying trees after a few shots have been fired. The guns can then wander about, and keeping between the rookery and these trees get many fair shots as the young birds try to return home on being frightened by persons told off for the purpose.

It must not, however, be forgotten that there are other aspects in which rook shooting may be viewed. It is said, though perhaps with but little truth, that a rookery will decrease in numbers if not regulary "shot." If this is really the case we have at once not only an excuse for rook-shooting, but its necessity demonstrated. There are, however, many persons not unendowed with common sense and not unversed in natural history who are staggered at this novel method of cultivating rooks. At all events, the increase of rook shooting of late years does not seem to have had the desired effect; for undoubtedly there has been a gradual decrease in the number of rooks for some time past in most districts, though the use of "poisoned grain," before alluded to, has had much to do with the decrease in several localities. In favour of rook shooting there is what may be called a

social element not to be overlooked. It gives the country squire the opportunity of affording a day's amusement to his tenants and others who look to him for an occasional compliment. Any gathering, which even in a remote degree seems to have an element of sport in it, is greatly appreciated, especially if, as is usually the case, a feed at the hall, or at the village "public," follows. The squire does a friendly act at a very cheap rate, and perhaps feels that his rookery does duty for his stubbles, turnips, and woods later in the season, when only his family friends or the local "select" are invited to partake of the sport.

The annual rook-shooting party on these occasions is a great event. Wondrous are the "arms of precision," or rather of non-precision, brought forth to do battle with the poor young rooks hitherto unconscious of powder. Everybody tries to look as sportsmanlike as possible, and to eclipse his neighbours in his performances. The fun waxes fast and furious; a regular or rather irregular fusillade is kept up all along the line; a gun going off by accident, or the bursting of a rusty or twice-loaded barrel, adds pleasurable excitement to the scene; and piles of dead and dying birds are soon collected without any questionings of cruelty or niceties of sport; and as long

as there is plenty of firing, and plenty of beer and tobacco, everybody is supremely happy, or appears to be so.

A more serious party is that which occasionally comes from the Hall itself, when the squire takes the cream of the rook shooting for himself and aristocratic friends. When such is the case there is no hurry and flurry. It is an eminently cool proceeding, devoid of all excitement. Such a party seldom uses shot guns. The pea rifle is *de rigeur* when young rooks and a couple of hours before luncheon are to be killed. All goes on well and demurely enough, the only excitement being when it comes to be a matter of wagering as to who can pick off some young bird which, in fear and trembling, has managed to gain the very topmost branches of one of the highest trees, and has thereby called special attention to himself and his really unenviable position. But the couple of hours is almost too long for the business, in which perhaps men are taking part who, in other lands, have dropped their elephants and bagged their tigers. Young rooks to such as these, and, indeed, to all the party, are but "small deer;" and yet the performers seem to fancy they have done a morning's work, and exhausted nature seeks to be refreshed by a

champagne luncheon or foaming tankards of bitter beer. Here a word of advice to rook shooters—never fire at birds when sitting at the edge of their nests. When hit they will fall into them three times out of four, and the fourth time, if they tumble outwards, their feet in their death agonies will cling convulsively and firmly to the material of the nests, and they will not come to the ground.

But perhaps, after all, the demand for rook pie may be the *raison d'être* of a rook's existence, the justification of rook shooting. Who shall say it is not? If a young rook is good for food, *cadit quæstio*, as far as regards the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the sport of slaying him. Rook pie may hardly be a dish to hunger for, and many people fancy it has a certain carrion flavour which does not recommend it to cultivated palates. Others, on the contrary, are enthusiastic as to its merits, and extol it above pigeon pie. *De gustibus &c. &c.* A gastronomic essay might be written on the subject without exhausting it. So here I shall leave it, only remarking that Waterton, a very observant naturalist, says, "a young crow pie is as good as a rook pie." Perhaps it may be; but few persons can have had an opportunity of tasting it. That a rook pie is *eatable*, enjoyable indeed

by those who have not for some reason or other taken a prejudice against it, must, I think, be admitted, and, if so, by all means let rook pies be multiplied, especially at a season of the year when the wild species of the feathered creation supply so little delicate food for man. Let your cook, however, if not learned in the art of rook-pie making, be duly taught to skin the young birds, and after taking out their back bones, to soak the bodies in milk-and-water, or better perhaps in salt-and-water. Under any circumstances, the stratum of beefsteak in the pie, the hard-boiled eggs, and the added gravy which has assumed the consistency of jelly, will be pretty eating enough.

I am sorry I am not able to be more enthusiastic on the subjects of rook pie and rook shooting.

FINIS.

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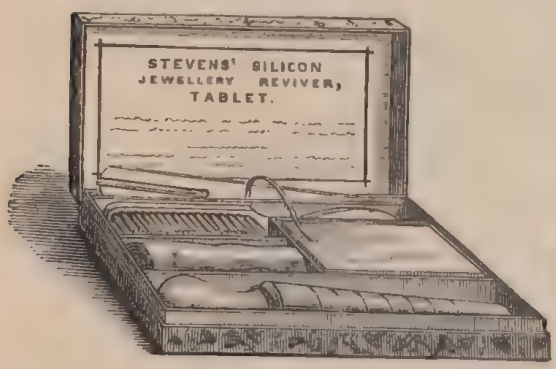

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Or PEARL DENTIFRICE is of inestimable value in preserving and beautifying the teeth, strengthening the gums, and giving a pleasant fragrance to the breath; it eradicates tartar from the teeth, prevents and arrests decay, and polishes and preserves the enamel, to which it imparts a pearl-like whiteness. Its unprecedented success for more than half a century shows the universal favor in which it is held, while the fact of its being entirely free from any acid or mineral ingredients constitutes it the safest and purest tooth powder ever used. To prevent fraud the genuine Odonto has a 3d. Government stamp on the box. Ask for Rowland's Odonto.

ROWLAND'S MACASSAR OIL

Is universally in high repute for its unprecedented success during the last 80 years in promoting the growth, restoring, improving, and beautifying the human hair. It prevents hair from falling off or turning grey, strengthens weak hair, cleanses it from scurf and dandriff, and makes it beautifully soft, pliable and glossy. For children it is especially recommended, as forming the basis of a beautiful head of hair, while its introduction into the nursery of Royalty is a sufficient proof of its merits. Sold in usual four sizes.

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An Eastern botanical preparation, perfectly free from all mineral or metallic admixture. It is distinguished for its extremely bland, purifying, and soothing effects on the skin; while by its action on the pores and minute secretory vessels, it promotes a healthy tone, allays every tendency to inflammation, and thus effectually dissipates all redness, tan, pimples, spots, freckles, discolourations, and other cutaneous visitations. The radiant bloom it imparts to the cheek, the softness and delicacy which it induces of the hands and arms, its capability of soothing irritation, and removing cutaneous defects, render it indispensable to every toilet. Gentlemen after shaving will find it renders the skin soft, smooth, and pleasant. Of all Chemists, at 4s. 6d. Avoid cheap spurious imitations. Sold by all dealers in perfumery.

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